

THE
RED
PATROL

ROBERT
LEIGHTON

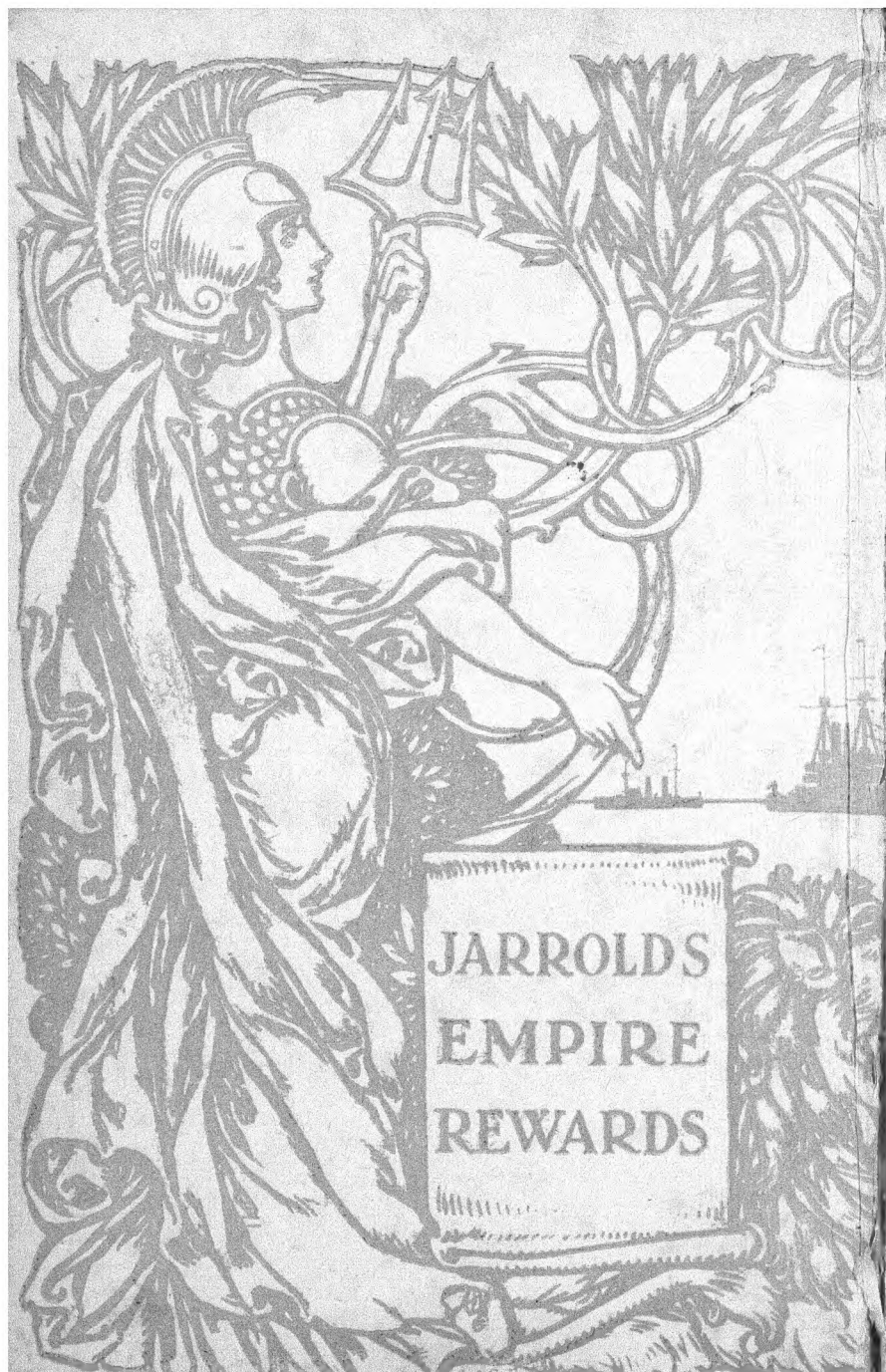


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THE
RED PATROL



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THE RED PATROL

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“The train rushed furiously onward between the writhing walls of flame.”

THE RED PATROL

*A STORY OF THE
NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE*

BY

ROBERT LEIGHTON

AUTHOR OF "GILDERSLEY'S TENDERFOOT," "RATTLESNAKE
RANCH," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK ALCOCK

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THE RED PATROL

CHAPTER I

THE NEWCOMER

THE International Limited emerged like a gaunt subterranean monster from the blackness of the tunnel, and, slowing down with a noisy creaking and grunting of brakes and a fierce hissing of escaping steam, came to a stop in front of the Big Horn Hotel at Dunniker's Hope. From the wide-open windows of the cars passengers thrust out inquisitive heads, wondering why there should be a halt at so insignificant a station, and how long they were to be delayed.

The unexpected stop was partly accounted for when a bag was handed out from the mail van, and it was seen that the locomotive's water-tank was being replenished.

It was further explained when the door of one of the cars was pushed open, and a solitary passenger alighted, timidly crossed the narrow strip of platform, and dumped a bundle of rugs and a dilapidated hold-all on a bench under the awning. He glanced bashfully at two perspiring youths who came out from the hotel stables to stare at the great train.

Rough-looking, sun-scorched fellows they were, in their wide-brimmed hats, blue shirts open at the neck, with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, their legs encased in loose leather leggings, their spurs clinking as they walked. One of them was hardly more than a boy, the other an olive-complexioned, black-haired half-breed. They flung themselves exhausted on the bench beside the stranger's baggage.

"Bagosh, but 'dat was 'ot ride!" panted the half-breed.

His companion pushed back his hat.

"Yes," he agreed, "but we got here on time, Frenchy." He looked aside at the newcomer and then at the crowd of labels that decorated the much-travelled hold-all. He saw the initials "R. W." impressed in black on the

worn leather, and again he raised his eyes, with keener scrutiny, to the newly arrived passenger's tall, well-dressed figure and interesting, boyish face.

"You've come out West, then, stranger?" he casually remarked, crossing his legs. "Can I help you any?"

The owner of the baggage nodded.

"Perhaps you can tell me how long I shall have to wait for a train going to Crow's Head Pass?" he asked.

The half-breed leant forward, thinking the question was addressed to himself.

"It ees evident m'sieu is stranger in dese part," he said in his quaint broken English. "Oh, well, I also—I, Pierre Adieu and 'Arvey Denham 'ere, we also was stranger leetle while ago. No, m'sieu, it ees not ver' long you wait."

"The train is in the siding, waiting to come up to the platform soon as the Limited quits," explained the boy referred to as Harvey Denham. "You're from the Old Country, I see."

The English boy did not seem to wish to gratify Canadian curiosity. He turned round

to give a farewell glance at the train which had been his home during the long journey across the plains.

His glance travelled the length of the train, to where a splash of scarlet cloth, brilliant in the glaring sunlight, held his eye, resolving itself into the form of a military tunic worn by a tall man who leant with an elbow on the ledge of the open window, conversing with a bare-headed, white-moustached passenger.

"I see that boy has got out here," the bare-headed passenger was saying. "I'd no idea this was his junction. Did you notice him as you came along, Sergeant?"

The sergeant nodded, without looking round.

"Why, cert'nly," he answered. "He's conspicuous. Looks like an English public school boy going home for the holidays. Know him, Colonel?"

"Only as a fellow-passenger," returned the colonel. "He didn't give me a chance of learning as much as I wanted to know. Wouldn't talk about himself. You're right about his being a public school boy, though. I gathered that he'd been ploughed—dis-

appointed in his career at home, and has come out West as a last resource in the hope of joining the Mounted Police."

"We can do with a lot more like him, to judge by his looks," observed the man in the red coat. "D'you know his name?"

"Yes—Roger Wingrove. I discovered that he's the son of a former chum of mine out in India—a fellow who had to send in his papers for turning tail on the enemy in one of our frontier campaigns. Hard lines on the youngster; but, of course—— Won't you smoke?"

He held out an open box of cigarettes. The sergeant took one, and as he stood back to light it, his eyes looked forth under the wide shadowing brim of his Stetson hat along the platform to where Roger Wingrove sat swinging a loose leg on a corner of the bench, watching him.

"Who and what is the cavalryman lighting the cigarette?" Wingrove inquired of Harvey Denham. "It's an uncommonly taking uniform."

"He's one of the Red Patrol," Denham answered, "a member of the Royal North-

West Mounted Police, and quite the bravest man in the Force."

"Oh, but, *mon ami*," objected Pierre Adieu, "you do 'im not enough credit. Sergeant Silk is sure de mos' brave man in de 'ole of Canada. What?"

"It amounts to the same thing, Frenchy," was Denham's prompt response.

Roger Wingrove's gaze was fixed with strange intensity upon the representative of a force whose reputation had claimed his interest for many a day past.

"One of the Mounted Police?" he repeated eagerly, and leaving his baggage he moved away to get a closer view of the red-coated policeman.

Silk extinguished his match between a finger and thumb, dropped it at his feet, and crushed it under his spurred heel.

"You fellows are astonishingly careful of fire," smiled the colonel.

"We have need to be," responded Silk, "especially at this time of year. Even now I'm off to tackle a forest fire that's burning at the back of the mountain yonder." He pointed northward. "You can see the smoke

from here. I've nearly ruined my mount, riding at top speed from Mosquito Crossing. And now it's a matter of a special train. It's all due to a silly caribou who neglected to put out the ashes of his camp fire. Say! there he is! If you'll excuse me, Colonel, I'll just go and tell him what I think. Good-bye."

There was a shrill whistle from the locomotive, followed by the loud clanging of a bell. The train slipped out of the station.

Silk strode along the platform, paying no regard to Roger Wingrove, who passed him and presently wheeled round to follow him. Near the entrance of the hotel Silk went aside and laid his hand on the shoulder of one of the few loiterers.

"Smooker," he said, "you camped alongside of Little Panther's section two nights ago, and by some stupid oversight you neglected to put your fire out when you went on. It may interest you to know that it is still burning; and so is Little Panther's wheat crop, possibly also his home lot. Do you happen to smell wood smoke?"

Smooker's face turned livid under its sunburn.

"Say, you've took hold of the wrong end of the stick this time, Sergeant," he stammered in protest. "Of course I smell wood smoke, and see it, too. But my fire was dead out when I left it, I kin swear."

"You had better be careful, Smooker," the officer cautioned. "I expect you know the penalty for carelessness of this sort. But if you don't, you will be enlightened considerably when your case is heard. In the meantime, perhaps you will make it convenient to go along by the train presently, and see what you can do to arrest the flames, see?"

"Eh? You mean I'm ter go right now—by the train Sam Kentish is drivin'?"

"Why, cert'nly. Do you expect the fire to hang around doing nothing while you waste your time playing dominoes and drinking doctored Big Horn Whisky?"

Roger Wingrove found himself listening as he stood watching the mosquitoes gyrating round a glass on one of the little tables. He was curiously attracted by the sharp, clear tones of Sergeant Silk's voice. He drew back a step as the sergeant turned.

"How do, boys?" said Silk, with a nod of

general recognition. He drew a handkerchief from the cuff of his tunic, took off his Stetson, and wiped his forehead, showing his handsome, wrinkled face.

Wingrove looked into that face now, trying to read it. He thought that he had never seen eyes so astonishingly clear and blue.

There were old scars about the cheeks, and a cut, as of a knife, was only partly concealed by the carefully groomed dark brown moustache.

Wingrove observed the man's athletic build under the stained and faded red tunic, with its bright brass buttons bearing the buffalo's head; he noticed the service revolver in its brown leather holster, and the glittering rows of cartridges in the bandolier. His gaze rested for a moment on the initials R.N.W.M.P. on the dark blue collar band, then on the triple chevron on the sleeve, and again on the blue trousers with their wide yellow stripe.

He did not know that all the time Sergeant Silk was aware of this careful examination, Silk was well accustomed to the curiosity of strangers concerning his uniform.

"How do, boys?" he said in greeting. "Ah, Denham, you here? Come all the way from Joe Gildersley's ranch? How's his crop of wheat getting on?"

"It's great," Denham answered. "Joe reckons it'll grade quite forty bushels to the acre."

"Good," smiled Silk. "You're well fire-guarded, I hope?"

"Trust Joe for that." Harvey Denham looked apprehensively northward to the cloud of brown smoke drifting across the mountains. "You coming along by this train to see what can be done, Sergeant? That fire'll do a heap of damage to Little Panther's section if the wind doesn't change."

"Sure," agreed Silk. "I'm glad you and Pierre have come. We shall need all the help we can get. You saw the smoke from afar, I suppose, and came right away, quick as your plugs could carry you?"

"Oh, well, it wasn't much of a journey—forty miles," said Denham, "and we were well mounted. Besides, Little Panther's such a friend of mine, you know."

"Exactly," Sergeant Silk acknowledged.

"I'm hangin' around expecting a report from along the line; but they appear to have gone asleep at the other end of the wires."

He dropped his cigarette and trod on it, turned on his heel, and disappeared through a door upon which the words "Telegraph Bureau" were roughly painted.

The branch line train was being shunted into the platform. Roger Wingrove stood idly watching it. But it was not of the train that he was thinking. He was thinking of Sergeant Silk's reputation for bravery, and of his own conscious inability to be brave.

There was no quality of manhood that Roger Wingrove envied more than physical courage, but in his secret heart he felt that he was a coward. The son of an officer who had been dismissed the service for an act of cowardice in face of the enemy, how could he help believing that he was himself lacking in the quality of courage?

He looked back now in imagination over the course of his past young life at home in England; but he could recall no occasion when he had performed an act of bravery. It seemed that there was some inborn defect in his nature

which made him timid, depriving him of nerve and pluck at the very moment when he wanted most to be courageous.

He caught a glimpse of Sergeant Silk's flaring red tunic through the doorway of the telegraph office.

"The bravest man in the Force!" he repeated. "How I envy him! The very sight of him makes me feel like a silly timid mouse! Well, I don't care. I'll go on now I'm here. If they don't accept me, I can always turn to farming or become a cowboy. But if they do take me, I know one thing, they shall never know that I'm a coward—never; and I shall not be satisfied until the day comes when this same Sergeant Silk—the bravest man in Canada—can take me by the hand and tell me that I, too, am brave."

CHAPTER II

THE RELIEF TRAIN

SERGEANT SILK came out of the telegraph office carrying his carbine in the crook of his arm. He signed to Harvey Denham to follow him, and strode with a smart, military swing along the train, glancing into the carriages as he passed, as though in search of some one.

Wingrove continued his walk in the same direction, hoping that the officer would pause and speak to him. But Silk, not seeming to observe him, went on, and stopped beside the cab of the great black grunting locomotive.

"Say, there, Sam," he called out.

The engineer showed a grimy face round the rim of the cab window.

"That's me," he answered, wiping his perspiring forehead with a handful of waste.

"You'd better put on a hustle," advised Silk. "I've been into the telegraph bureau and couldn't get a connection beyond Baskerville's

box. Seems to me the flames have been having a lark with some of the poles. You know what that means."

"Guess it ought to mean as the fire has jumped the track," nodded Sam Kentish. "Not much good our startin' at that rate, eh? Was you figurin' to go along thar, Serg'nt?"

"Why, cert'nly," said Silk. "That's why I'm here. That's why this train is going to start. There's a big crowd of Indians—some white people as well—in the shacks between the forest and the lake, and Little Panther's needing help to save them, see? You've got to push along as far as there's a clear track. You'll have nothing but the brake-van and another car or so behind you."

"Kinder special relief service, then?" Sam interrogated in surprise at this change in his usual programme.

"Exactly," returned Silk. "Horse her along. Drop me and the others as near as you can to the muskeg. There's nothing to wait for, once we're aboard."

As Sam clutched the reverse lever, Silk leant his carbine against the step, dropped his hat beside it, and climbed alertly into the cab.

"Hold hard," he ordered, "I'm not quite ready yet."

He crawled on hands and knees across the footplate to the farther side, where he thrust forth his head and looked backward along the line.

"Thought so," he nodded to himself, returning to take up his hat and gun.

Harvey Denham stood near him, wondering what he had been doing on the engine. Silk took hold of the boy's arm and bent to speak to him.

"Harve," he said, "there's a chap hanging around here trying all he can to keep out of my sight. At the present moment he's at the far side of this train, waiting to sneak on board. Well, it's rather important that I should know whether he goes on or is left behind. Watch him, will you?"

"Right," said Harvey; "a criminal, I suppose? You want to collar him?"

"I did not say so." Silk carefully crushed his hat into shape and adjusted the chin strap in its usual place at the back of his head. "He's in his shirt sleeves, looks like a plate-layer; black moustache, short black hair, no

hat. But you know Hen Warburton, don't you?"

"Sure," signified Denham. "What's his crime, Sergeant? Something serious?"

"Never mind," urged Silk. "Quit. We're ready to start. Don't miss the train."

He came face to face with Roger Wingrove, who saluted him.

"Are you coming along with us, then, Mr. Wingrove?" the sergeant inquired, looking into the young fellow's eyes and thinking of what he had heard of the soldier who had been cashiered for cowardice.

Wingrove started at being addressed by his name.

"Yes," he answered, believing that the train was an ordinary one for passengers.

"There is some danger, you know," Silk warned him. "We may have to put on full steam and rush through the heart of that forest fire. If you are not in a great hurry to get to your destination, they can put you up at the Big Horn Hotel here."

Wingrove winced inwardly, but he steeled himself to say—

"I hope you don't think I'm afraid."

Silk made no answer, but went aside to speak with the divisional superintendent, who had been uncoupling the superfluous carriages.

There was a shrill screech from the engine's whistle. Roger Wingrove turned to see Pierre Adieu bundling his baggage into the car. He leapt in after him to claim his property, when the door was slammed behind him, and the train gave a sudden jolt. Whether he was afraid or not, it was too late now to turn back.

"M'sieu's baggage is 'ere all right," said Pierre Adieu at his elbow.

"I never asked you to put it on the train," Wingrove cried with some irritation.

"But what would you?" returned Pierre. "It was not *necessaire* you ask. It is done. I wish only save m'sieu some trouble."

Wingrove dropped into the nearest seat, not knowing whether to be sorry or satisfied that he was going into danger. He heard voices from the adjoining van. The swing door of the connecting corridor opened, and Harvey Denham advanced towards him. At the same moment there was a click of spurs, and he glanced up to see the gleam of Sergeant Silk's red tunic.

"Well?" said Silk. It was to Harvey Denham that he spoke. He seated himself on the arm of one of the seats with his carbine between his knees.

"It's all right," Denham informed him, leaning an elbow on the back of the same seat. "Hen Warburton is perched on the front end of the engine, with his back against the steam chest and his feet dangling across the cow-catcher."

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed Pierre Adieu, "dat was ver' nice, ver' cheap way for travel, *hein?* Nevertheless, I t'ink 'e find it jolly 'ot."

"I'm afraid he will find it hotter still if he stops on his perch until we get among the flames," said Silk, rising to his feet. "Thank you, Harve, I am satisfied to know where he is."

"You go right now for mek 'im prisoner, Sergeant?" Pierre ventured to inquire. "*Tiens!* dat was 'arsh. 'E 'ave wife and family, you un'erstand."

"Harsh?" echoed Silk. "I don't know about that. If he is innocent, why does he try to escape? I have accused him of nothing—yet."

Roger Wingrove was now leaning outward on the edge of the open window. The train was gathering headway, rushing at a rattling pace down a steep gradient. Sam Kentish was taking Silk's recommendation to "horse her along."

"So you decided to come by this train, after all?" said Silk, laying a hand on the ledge and bending over to look out.

Wingrove drew back to give him more space.

"Yes," he faltered. "Did you think I was afraid?"

Silk sat down, facing him.

"I thought it would perhaps be wiser of you to stay behind," he responded, "unless, as I said, you are in a desperate hurry to get to your destination."

"I am in no hurry at all," returned Wingrove. "Next week would have done as well."

"Then why did you come? I told you that we were going into the thick of the fire. There was no need for you to come."

The young fellow drew a deep breath.

"Do you suppose there's more danger for me than for you?" he asked, hiding the fact that he had come against his will.

Sergeant Silk smiled. There was something about this boy from the Old Country that he liked—something that reminded him of his school-fellows of long ago in England.

“Not at all,” he answered. “Though I am different. You see, it is my business, my duty, to go into danger. And when it is one’s duty one has to go forward whether one wants to or not. It is my duty now to go and fight the fire that’s raging over there, and try my level best to stop it. There is a village of Indians and half-breeds within reach of the flames—men and women and little children. I’ve got to try to save them. I may get killed in the attempt. But what has that got to do with it? It’s all in the day’s work.”

“And that’s the sort of work the Mounted Police are expected to do?” Roger Wingrove ventured.

“Exactly. The Force is not a nursery.”

Wingrove was about to ask further questions, but with a nod Silk left him, and the train rattled along, now crossing a wide track through ripe cornfields, now speeding over stretches of prairie brilliant with flowers, but more often rushing through deep mountain defiles that

curved and twisted, or along the wooded shores of lakes that lay blue and still. He was alone for about half-an-hour, when Sergeant Silk returned.

"If you care to come forward into the van," he invited, "you'll get a good view of that fire as we double the next curve."

Wingrove followed him through the corridor into the small freight van, where half-a-dozen men were gathered, with Harvey Denham and Pierre Adieu in their midst. The engine bell was clanging furiously, the whistle was blowing shrilly.

Suddenly the train swept round a sharp curve and the gloom was broken by a fierce ruddy glare. Hardly a mile away, in front of the great black engine rushing at full speed towards it, there was a solid unbroken wall of writhing flames. From where he stood, Wingrove could see the glittering metals converging into the very heart of the awful furnace. He laid a trembling hand on the arm of Sergeant Silk.

"Why don't we stop?" he cried agitatedly. "Why don't we turn back? Is the driver mad?—mad?"

Silk affected not to hear—not to be aware

of the fingers that were clutching desperately at his arm.

"Guess Hen Warburton's going to feel kind of warm, now," he calmly remarked, stiffening his arm.

"Bagosh, yes," exclaimed Pierre Adieu. "And we also. What?"

Hen Warburton's perch in front of the racing locomotive was certainly perilous. The strip of plating under the projecting steam chest was so narrow that there was hardly space for him to kneel and keep his difficult balance.

He could feel the scorching heat of the boiler through the soles of his boots. The iron was painfully hot and hard under the pressure of his knees. There was a leaky tube somewhere above him, from which scalding drops of condensed steam fell intermittently on the small of his thinly clothed back. He was afraid to move, lest a sudden lurch of the engine as she pounded over the frogs should fling him bodily forward on the track.

He clung with both hands to the rail above the fender, on the support of his rigid muscles. At sight of the surging flames that were turning the green shelter of the forest into a grim

scene of devastation, he drew a deep gasp of consternation.

He could see no opening in the vast stretch of burning trees; only the shining double thread of metals, that lost themselves in the heart of the glowing furnace. He knew that those flames would soon be curling their hungry red tongues around him.

Raising himself to a crouching position he crawled inch by inch unsteadily to the leeward end of the footplate, clutching at the step and climbing upward, bearing the heat of the boiler until at last he stood clinging to the higher handrail, looking forward in terror to the golden flakes of fire that leapt into the blackness from the long crimson line of burning scrub; listening to the angry roar of the flames and the crashing of falling timber.

Inside the cab the engineer stood at his post, his hand on the throttle, his eye on the steam gauge.

"Sam! Sam!" cried his stoker. "Thar's a man out thar on our front end!"

"So I see!" Sam nodded grimly. "Lay hold of that dope bucket. Keep throwin' water on me. Start right now."

Shuddering as the bucket was emptied over his head and shoulders, he clutched the lever with both hands and forced it down a couple of notches. And, fast as she was going before, she now leapt ahead under the impetus of the higher pressure. He opened the whistle valve and with a piercing shriek the train dashed into the midst of the devouring blaze.

"Keep that bucket at work!" cried Kentish as a spark struck his neck. "We shall git through all right so long as the track's clear. She's doin' herself proud."

The screeching of his whistle had ceased, and the train rushed furiously onward between the writhing walls of flame.

The splitting of great tree-trunks, the strong, deep-throated roar of the burning branches, and the fierce crackle of the lighter twigs and parched grass rose louder still above the noisy beat of the engine's pistons and the thumping of her wheels. Dense clouds of acrid, resinous smoke and stinging sparks were belched across the track. Long flames forked upward from the red-hot ground, to snatch at the cars as they flashed past.

There was a crash of splintering glass in the

forward van and a gush of choking smoke and sparks burst through the opening. Sergeant Silk glanced aside into the firelit face of Roger Wingrove. He saw that it was ghastly white.

It seemed in very truth as if the driver had gone mad to enter that terrible inferno, courting swift and certain destruction.

But Sam Kentish had carefully calculated his chances of getting through. He knew that the forest track had been made by men who had counted upon the possibility of a conflagration such as this, and that the larger trees had been cleared on either side of the permanent way.

A growth of spruce and hickory saplings had since sprung up, but these were so small that the cow-catcher in front of the locomotive would hurl aside any that should fall across the metals, forcing a passage through the obstruction.

Hen Warburton, clinging with scorched fingers to the handrail, holding with cramped feet to the narrow ledge above the wheels, kept his painfully nipping eyes fixed upon the line. He saw a coyote lope across the track, its fur singed to the skin. Rabbits, squirrels, and other small animals scattered from the shelter

of the metals as the train thundered near; a large bird flying over struck him on the cheek with its wing, leaving the smell of burnt feathers in his nostrils. Here and there a half-consumed telegraph pole leant over, the fire running up to the insulators, the wires hanging in a confused tangle.

Suddenly, far in advance, near a small clearing, he saw a giant tree sway over from the edge of a projecting bank. It fell across the line, blazing like a bonfire.

Hen turned and scrambled blindly backward to alarm the driver. But Kentish had seen the tree falling, and his hands were busy among the cranks and levers. The brakes were put on hard. Steam was shut off. The engine responded to the check, slowed down, and crunched unhurt into the burning pile, rebounding on level wheels and then backing to a stop.

Sergeant Silk had flung open the van door. He climbed out and stood on a patch of smouldering grass.

"Look after yourself, Sam!" he cried.
"Come along, boys! This way!"

Hen Warburton ran boldly up to him, and

clutching excitedly at his arm, pointed through the burning bush.

"The muskeg!" he panted. "I know the road!"

Silk turned to watch his helpmates clambering out of the van. Harvey Denham was the first, then Pierre, then Smooker, and two others. But one stood irresolute on the step, staring into the flames, trembling visibly.

Sergeant Silk stepped nearer to him, holding up his empty hands. He had left his carbine and bandolier in the van.

"Well?" he said, very calmly.

That one little word struck Roger Wingrove's wavering brain with the force of a compelling challenge. He bent forward, jumped, and said with a nervous laugh—

"I'm coming with you, Sergeant. I'm coming with you."

And he plunged forward to face the red horror in front of him.

CHAPTER III

FIGHTING THE FLAMES

"THAT'S right." Sergeant Silk's voice was sharply incisive. He took pleasure in seeing fellows force themselves to do the thing they disliked. It was clear to him that Roger Wingrove had had some difficulty in overcoming his unwillingness to venture into the burning forest, and the decision satisfied him. He looked the boy up and down with quick calculation.

"Your ankles will get scorched," he said. "Turn your socks outside your trousers. I'll codge up a pair of gaiters for you."

The stoker had thrown half-a-dozen stout staves down from the tender. Each staff was thickly swathed at one end with a bunch of coarse wet sackcloth, converting it into a mop, to be used in beating a path through the scrub. Silk seized one of them, severed the rope that bound the swathing, and adroitly drew off two long lengths of the sacking.

"Shove your foot on my knee," he ordered, "your hand on my shoulder."

Very skilfully, very quickly, he tightly wrapped the strips of cloth, like puttees, round each of Wingrove's shins from ankle to knee, securing them with garters of rope.

"That'll do," he nodded. "Now lay hold of your mop and come."

Silk turned a swift glance of his reddened eyes to his waiting companions. There were seven of them, each armed with a mop, from which slow drops of water fell hissing into the glowing turf at their feet.

"Now, boys, we'll start," he said, pulling on his gauntlets. "There's a possible trail through a coulée to the muskeg, Hen says. Close up. Keep together. If any one of you falls out, he may not be found again. Mush along, Hen! Keep to the railroad track as far as the bluff, there; then sharp to the left." He waved a hand to the engine, now backing away with jangling cranks and pistons. "So long, Sam!" he shouted. "Don't hang around for us."

Hen Warburton led off along the fringe of the track, picking his way, leaping over the

piled-up furrows of smoking *débris*. He went at a run past the fallen pine tree that lay burning furiously across the buckled metals, and then continued at scout's pace through the cutting.

Beyond the high bank from which the forest monster had fallen, Sergeant Silk overtook him, wielding his wet mop as he went, beating down the flames that cracked and writhed in the bushes of saskatoon and cranberry; forcing a passage for himself and the others who followed.

Roger Wingrove and Harvey Denham were at the rear. Their eyes were nipping, their throats and nostrils were stifled with the fumes.

"Keep your eye on Sergeant Silk's red jacket," Harvey recommended. "We shall be all right if we follow him close. Mind your head under that branch. We can't be very far from the muskeg."

He thrust a burning bush aside with his mop for Wingrove to pass.

"What's a muskeg?" Wingrove wanted to know.

"Kind of swamp," Denham told him. "It's like a quicksand in rainy weather. Cattle often

get swallowed up in it; but it'll bear us now, and it won't burn."

East and west the fire was eating into the forest with swift, fierce jaws, snatching angrily at the tall trunks, licking at the moss-grown bark, and flaring with a ceaseless crackling noise in the upper branches.

Roger Wingrove drew back, shielding his face from the heat and the flying sparks, coughing as the pungent fumes gripped at his throat.

Through clearing and blaze Silk's companions followed him unquestioningly, knowing that they were safe while he was there to show them a way. Their mops were soon dry as tinder and smouldering; jets of smoke speckled their clothing, stinging sparks alighted on their unprotected faces and hands and arms; the red-hot earth was burning their boots.

Once Silk halted on the gravel of a dried-up stream, bent down, and wrenched off his hot spurs. There was a gaping hole in the toe of his left boot, his scarlet tunic was blotched where the sparks and flaming twigs had burnt it, and the rim of his Stetson hat carried a thick dust of charcoal smuts.

"This way, boys," he cried, when they were all gathered about him.

He led them at a run down the stony bed of the stream, where they paused to take breath, to drink from their water-bottles, and prepare for a further dash. Warburton's shirt was burnt to rags, and there was an ugly red blister across his naked back. Smooker was trying to dislodge a bit of grit from a watering eye, helped by Pierre Adieu, who fished it out with a blade of grass.

In the pause, Sergeant Silk laid a hand on Roger Wingrove's shoulder. It was to crush out a spark that was burning a hole in the tweed; but the touch was gentle, and Wingrove felt proud to be patted on the shoulder by such a man.

"Well?" Silk smiled to him. "So you think you would like to take up this game, eh?"

Wingrove raised his eyes to the sergeant's smoke-grimed face.

"Do you mean the game of the Mounted Police?" he asked in wonder at the question being asked in such a moment.

"Exactly." Silk gave a short, sharp nod.

"Colonel Macpherson told me that you had that idea. I admit that the game has some elements of interest, as you can see for yourself."

"Do you advise me to join, Sergeant?" Wingrove faltered.

"Eh? Oh, the police? My dear chap, no. There are heaps of things better for you than that. Come along, boys!"

He started off once again, this time with Roger Wingrove and Harvey Denham close at his heels. They soon fought a passage through the flaming trees, and at last came out upon the green, soft moss and reeds of the swamp, where screeching crowds of forest creatures had taken refuge.

They crossed the spongy ground to the farther side, where they found a water-hole, in which they soaked their mops, and cooled their blistered feet.

"You'll be all right here, for a bit," said Silk. "The muskeg won't burn."

"And what are you going to do, then?" Harvey Denham asked, seeing that he was about to move away.

"I? Oh, I'm just going for a stroll," Silk

answered lightly. "I shall be back before long. Keep together, all of you."

"Say, I'm goin' with you," declared Hen Warburton, guessing his intention.

"And I also—I go, too," said Pierre Adieu. "Why not?"

"No, Pierre." Silk looked back over his shoulder. "You will stay where you are. Hen can come, if he likes; but no one else."

The two of them disappeared like ghosts through the grey wall of rolling smoke and leaping flames.

"Suppose he never comes back!" Roger Wingrove looked round at the enclosing ring of fire. "We can't get out of this—we can't get out of this!"

He spoke as if in fear; escape seemed impossible. And yet in his heart there was a half-wild delight in the danger that menaced him.

He stood very still, with his singed hands deep in his jacket pockets. He saw birds crouching low in the reeds. The moist ground was full of the rush and panic hurry of squealing little animals; a young lynx, singed naked, lay panting at his feet; he heard the agonised

yelping of a fox; every tuft of grass sheltered a restless crowd of insects.

"Suppose he never comes back!" he repeated.

"Silk will come back for us, sure," said Harvey Denham. "He's only giving us a spell of rest while he goes scouting around a bit."

"But, yes," added Pierre Adieu. "'E go for find de heasy way, so we come out more queek. We rest quiet, then. What?"

They wait'd in silence for a long time, each busy with his own thoughts.

Suddenly from behind them came a feeble shout—

"This way, boys!"

They all turned to see the dull gleam of a red coat through the mist of smoke. As they ran forward, Sergeant Silk staggered out to meet them. His knees gave way under him; he flung out his arms, dropping his staff, lurched aside, wheeled round, and fell with a thud on his back.

"All right," he cried. "I—I only tripped. My boot——"

Roger Wingrove was the first to reach him,

and put his arms about his shoulders to lift him. Silk's eyes were shut, the lids were inflamed and swollen, the long dark lashes were singed, his face was blackened with smoke. He was breathing hoarsely, with his mouth open, and his tongue showing 'dry.

"Any of you got some water left?" Wingrove asked as he supported the sergeant.

Harvey Denham handed him a half-empty water-bottle, and he held it to Silk's parched lips. Silk drank a little, and drew a deep breath of relief.

"Thank you," he said, opening his eyes. "That's enough. I shall be all right now. Little Panther's wheat patch is done for, but he got the ploughs to work, and saved his field of oats. His home lot is still in danger, though; and his people are all crowding down to the lake." He raised himself with an effort. "We'll be getting along there, now."

"But are you fit?" exclaimed Wingrove, glancing at the man's burnt boots.

"Why, cert'nly," returned Silk, with a forced laugh, rising to his feet. "That drink you gave me was all I needed. But there's a chunk

of charcoal in my right eye if one of you could get on its trail."

He pulled off one of his gloves, and drew down the lower eyelid as he bent in front of Wingrove.

Roger Wingrove took out a very clean white handkerchief, and screwed a corner of it into a point.

"I see it," he said, and very gently he removed the offending speck of grit.

"Where have you left Hen Warburton?" Denham inquired.

"Oh, Hen's all right," replied Silk, turning to go back into the belt of fire. "He's with Little Panther, down at the shacks."

"Wait!" cried Wingrove. "That boot of yours will trip you again if you don't have it tied up, somehow. Allow me."

He took off his neck-scarf, and deftly tied an end of it to a corner of his handkerchief.

"Come, that's thoughtful of you," said Silk, seeing what the boy was preparing to do.

He raised his foot to the support of Wingrove's knee, and Wingrove proceeded to bind it round as with a surgical bandage that would protect the foot, at least for a time.

"*Tiens!* Dat was not so bad, dat idea to bind a broken boot," said Pierre Adieu, following Harvey Denham from the muskeg into the opening through which Silk had just led the way.

"It'll keep the sergeant's foot from being badly burnt, anyhow," returned Harvey.

"For myself," pursued Pierre, "I only regret it was not I who should 'ave ze idea."

They renewed their fight with the flames that curled about them as they began to climb the steep ascent of a hill, from which they descended to the margin of a blackened cornfield, where they waded ankle deep through the burnt straw that still smouldered hotly, working their way round until they came within sight of the timber-built huts and skin-covered wigwams of the Indian village, smothered in smoke that drifted over the lake beyond.

At the near side of the village a wide band of ground had been newly ploughed to keep the fire from spreading to the horse corrals and the huts. Yet this fire-guard had not been enough, for the flames had jumped it, and were already creeping along the ground beyond, seizing the parched herbage, and running in

long streaks like tidal waves towards the shacks.

Two of the wooden huts were on fire, and around the others many Indians could be seen through the smoke, busily beating at the burning shrubs, digging trenches, trying to save their household furniture. Some were at work in the corrals, leading out their horses and driving obstinate cattle to the gates.

For a moment Sergeant Silk stood irresolute, looking troubled.

"The wind is rising," he said grimly. "We may save some of the people. We can't save their homes." He turned his eyes to the lake, and to the shadowy outline of an island that was hardly visible through the thick drift of smoke. "They've got no boats," he added. "How are we to get them across to there?"

CHAPTER IV

THE BURNING VILLAGE

To and fro between the lake and the threatened village, Little Panther galloped on his snow-white broncho, gathering his terrified people together at the water's edge, ordering the lingerers out of their homes, bidding them sacrifice the useless treasures that they sought to save, and to carry away only food and blankets, and such things as would float.

From the village he rode to the corrals to see to the saving of the cattle and horses, and from the corrals along the newly-dug trenches to the edge of the forest, where the red line of flames surged ever onward in an advancing flood.

Then, again, he galloped to the side of the lake, where the women and children waited and wept, vaguely trusting that the wind would change, or that rain should fall, or some unknown messenger of Providence should come to their rescue.

Amongst them the chief's beautiful young squaw, White Plume, moved calmly, cheering them with soft words of hope and encouragement, working with them to tie up their bundles, and bury their stores of peltry under the sand.

Little Panther rode up to her.

"The train has gone back," he said to her in his good English. "A tree has fallen across the line, and the engine cannot pass. It is bad medicine. But help is coming, my little one."

White Plume glanced round at the children. There were tears in her great eyes.

"The train should have started sooner," she said. "We could have broken a trail across the muskeg before the fire jumped the lines. But since that way of escape is cut off, we can trust to the lake. We have two canoes. Eagle's Wing and Cut Knife are now coming back from the island. But the work is slow—so slow. Little Panther would have been wise to listen to the words of the Red Patrol and make more canoes."

"It would have been wise," Little Panther acknowledged. "White Plume will see that the two canoes are not overcrowded. They would sink."

"The squaws are so stupid," said White Plume. "They always think that one more will not matter. One spat in the face of the white man because he held her back."

The white man was Hen Warburton. Hen strode up to Little Panther now, and stood looking back to the blazing forest, pointing across the blackness of the ground where the cornfield had been.

"Guess they'll come out over thar," he said. "Sergeant Silk knows the road."

Little Panther leant over to him sharply, eagerly.

"Did you say Sergeant Silk?" he cried. "Ah, we are saved!"

"Yes, but he ain't got through, not yet," Hen warned him, with a grave headshake, "and thar's the others. Silk won't leave none of 'em behind, even though he's got to stay himself."

A shrill whistle sounded from the direction in which he had pointed. Little Panther put spurs to his horse and galloped off. He could see the figures of his helpers looming through the smoke, and he dashed towards them, urging his horse with wild, Indian cries. He soon dis-



"HOW!" HE CRIED ALOUD, WAVING HIS HAND IN GREETING.

tinguished Sergeant Silk by his red tunic and battered Stetson hat, and then he saw Harvey Denham and Pierre Adieu.

"How! How! How!" he cried aloud, waving his hand in greeting. Then he pulled up abruptly, and swung himself to the ground and waited, with his moccasined feet ankle deep in the smouldering grass, until Silk limped to his side.

"How! Little Panther," returned Silk, taking the Indian's hand. "Your teepees are getting it, I see. You can't save 'em. We must get that crowd of women and children across to the island, and swim your horses and cattle along with them. Those two canoes of yours are no good. They don't hold more than three each, and a papoose or so. We must have rafts."

"Rafts?" Little Panther repeated.

"Why, cert'nly. Your people can't stand up to their necks in the water all night, with this wind sweeping the smoke over them—choking them."

"For rafts timber is needed," the Indian reminded him.

"Exactly," Silk nodded curtly. "You've

got some, haven't you? Draw off those men that are digging down there. They're doing no good. Tell them to pull 'down the cabins, and carry the logs 'down to the water. Throw all your boxes and packing-cases—anything that will float—into the lake. Don't let them get scared. There's plenty of time to 'do things properly. Where's White Plume? I can't see very well. My eyes are full of grit."

Little Panther pointed down to the lake side.

"White Plume takes care of the women and children," he answered.

"Good," said Silk. "We'll get busy, then. But, first, if you can lay your hands on a few full-grown pairs of moccasins, let's have them right now. Our boots are some leaky."

Little Panther stooped to pull off his own, but thought that a better plan would be to let Sergeant Silk have the horse.

"Mount!" he said invitingly.

Silk demurred a moment, then accepted the offer. He was more at home in the saddle than on foot, and he could get about more quickly.

"Boys," he said, as he settled himself astride. "You can see what's wanted. Do

what you can. Get some water to drink, look after your feet and eyes. Take horses if you want 'em. Smoker, you'd best see to the rafts, along with Pierre. Denham, you're a good swimmer, the lake's your place. Napp and Rogan'll help pull down the shacks."

"And I?" pleaded Roger Wingrove.

Sergeant Silk seemed to have forgotten him, and was turning to ride off. He looked down into the young fellow's smoke-smeared face and clear brown eyes—eyes that as yet seemed hardly to have suffered from the smoke and sparks.

"It is hardly for me to order you," he responded quietly. "I think you had better follow your own instincts; only—don't run any needless risks."

He rode off then, and Wingrove followed with Little Panther down to the village, wondering whether Sergeant Silk mistrusted him. While he went, he watched Silk racing over the burning brushwood, and saw him bend in the saddle as the white broncho gathered itself for a jump to clear the flames that forked up from a fallen tree.

"How that fellow can ride!" he exclaimed.

"But yes," said Pierre Adieu. "'E is ze bes' rider in ze 'ole of Canađa, they say."

"You're a rider yourself, I suppose?" questioned Harvey Denham.

"I used to think so," Wingrove answered, glancing forward at Little Panther, who strode on with a long, swinging stride, with his gaze fixed upon his doomed home. "Is that chap a real Redskin?"

"He is an Agency Indian," Harvey told him. "The Government gave him this section, and he was making good. But he'll have to begin all over again now."

"How are we going to get out of this mess that we've tumbled into?" Wingrove wondered. "Where are we going to sleep to-night? How are we going to get food?"

"I expect that's just what those poor Indians down there are asking themselves," Harvey responded without further answer. He had not thought of anything beyond the fire and its victims.

As they passed by the corrals, the horses were being led out. Roger Wingrove saw one that was saddled and bridled. It was a very beautiful thoroughbred stallion, and he admired

it. Remembering what Sergeant Silk had said, he turned to Harvey Denham.

"My feet are all right," he said, "and I don't need any moccasins. I can get a drink down at that lake presently. There's a horse there that I rather fancy, if I might use it."

"No one will object," said Denham. "Mount it, by all means, if you think it better than walking."

Roger Wingrove mounted the thoroughbred, and rode off towards the lake. He found when he got there that there was little he could do. The two canoes had just put off with refugees for the island; there was no timber for the making of rafts; the women and children could not be helped. But he encountered Hen Warburton,

"Say, mister," said Hen, coming up to him, "thar's a trapper's shanty 'bout half-a-mile along the beach. I reckon he's been forgotten. His daughter's lyin' ill, too, and the fire's makin' that way. Guess it wouldn't take you long ter ride along thar an' see, eh—not on a hoss like that? It's just this side of the poplar bluff that's burnin'. It's ringed round with fire."

"I'll go and have a look," said Wingrove,

gathering the reins in his fingers. "Tell Sergeant Silk where I've gone."

He rode off along the reedy margin of the lake. It was in a direction opposite to the one in which Silk had gone. The high bank to his right was burning, and clouds of smoke rolled over, and flaming twigs and showers of nipping sparks fell on him; but the shore itself was sheltered, and it was only here and there that he had to turn aside to get past a patch of flaming brushwood.

Warburton had understated the distance when he said that the shanty was not more than half-a-mile away; but Wingrove rode on, searching for it, resolved to turn back if he should not find it soon. In front of him there was a point of land jutting into the lake, as yet untouched by the flames. As he drew nearer to it he saw that it was a small island, cut off by a narrow inlet,

He was coming up to it when, glancing aside into a little clearing, he saw the wooden shanty. The flames were creeping towards it from the rear. The door stood open. He went to it, and bent his head to look within. There was no sign of an occupant.

"Is there anybody here?" he cried aloud.

There was no answer. He drove the horse over the threshold. No, there was no one there. Backing out, he paused for a while, shouting. Then there came to him a curious wailing scream from far back where the flames and smoke were thickest.

He saw a pathway, and rode along it, searching, searching. The scream was repeated. He went on more quickly.

Then he saw something white through the greyness of the smoke, and as he went nearer he saw that it was a girl. She was on her hands and knees, crawling slowly, very slowly as if she were very ill, and were trying to escape. Yet she was going towards the flames, instead of away from them.

Wingrove drew rein, and she turned a ghostly white face towards him as she raised one of her hands and pointed among the trees.

"He is there—there!" she wailed. "Oh, save him! Save him!"

He rode on a few yards, searching in the direction the girl had indicated, and suddenly he came upon a sight that made him catch his breath in consternation. It was a stout, gnarled

tree, and against its rough trunk, high up above the reach of the flaming undergrowth, a man was feebly struggling and kicking, held suspended by his right arm, which was caught up to the elbow in a hole.

How the man had got himself into that terrible position, and how long he might have been there, Wingrove did not pause to conjecture. He rode up to the tree, and, halting, raised himself in the saddle. He could touch the man's legs, but he was not high enough to lift him so that he might withdraw his imprisoned arm.

Steadying the horse, he got across the saddle on his knees, hitched the rein on a spur of broken branch, gripped the man's body in his two arms, and lifted him very slowly, very carefully, higher and higher, until the arm was drawn outward a few inches. Then he lowered himself astride the saddle, and, gripping the fellow's belt, pulled at it, when the body, released, dropped inertly upon his shoulder.

The man was unconscious, and his arm was broken; but he was not dead. He was saved from the fire.

Wingrove got him across the saddle, and rode

away with him. Passing the girl, he called out to her to be patient, and he would come back for her.

He rode down the path to the lake, waded the horse across the shallow strip of water to the little island, and left the unconscious man under the shelter of a rock, where no flames could reach him.

Returning to the girl, he 'dismounted, managed with much difficulty to hoist her to the horse's back, got up behind her, and again rode away, this time along the shore of the lake, back to the doomed village, where a new adventure awaited him.

CHAPTER V

THE PERIL OF WHITE PLUME

ROGER WINGROVE rode out from a thick cloud of stifling smoke, and drew to a halt in the midst of the squaws and children huddled like a flock of terrified sheep at the side of the lake.

Many of them were up to their necks in the water, sheltering from the scorching breath of the flames that were eating their way nearer and nearer. Some were clinging desperately to floating pieces of furniture.

Every device that the instinct of motherhood could suggest was employed to save the little ones. Boxes, teepee poles, chairs, tables, anything that would float was launched to bear those helpless young lives to safety; but fire, air, and water were in league against the refugees.

Fierce, smoke-laden squalls swept down upon them, and in their terror they lost all sense

of discipline and obedience, adding to the general panic by their screams.

Wingrove searched around trying to understand what was being done. He knew that the only place of refuge was the island lying half-a-mile away; but how were these people to be taken across when there were no boats, no rafts? Two tiny birch-bark canoes were coming back, an Indian at the paddle of each, bending to his work. He could see how small and frail they were.

He saw Harvey Denham with a child in his arms wading thigh deep, and pushing in front of him a floating table upon which two other children lay, wrapped in blankets. He saw White Plume trying to still the panic, and Pierre Adieu flinging back a half-breed youth from a charred tree-trunk that he had just launched.

Hen Warburton was occupied in nailing two sugar boxes to the support of a couple of logs.

"It is no use you cry like this!" Wingrove heard White Plume saying to a half-breed woman who sat sobbing on a bale of deerskins.

"It is that I cry for my little one," the woman wailed. "'E be keel. I leave 'im, the *pauvre*

enfant, shut in ze beeg box. What would you? I think 'e there safe; but now, *voilà*, ze flame reach 'im!"

"Well, well, then," said White Plume, consolingly, "I go fetch the little one."

She turned, and saw Roger Wingrove near her, clinging to the sick girl who lay across the horse's shoulders in front of him while he prepared to dismount.

"Will you lend me a hand here?" he pleaded,

White Plume went to him quickly, and together they lowered the girl to the ground.

"Who is she, then?" White Plume asked in wonder. "Ah, but I see, it is Celeste Pascal. We had not remembered she was ill and helpless."

They carried the girl to a bundle of blankets, and left her in charge of the squaws. White Plume ran up the slope towards the burning huts, and disappeared into the smoke.

Wingrove searched around for Sergeant Silk, but saw no sign of him.

"Now, I suppose, I ought to go and fetch the girl's father," he reflected.

He looked back along the way by which he

had just come, and saw an immense fir-tree tottering at the brink of the high bank. Its dry, feathery branches were in flames, the stout trunk was a crimson glow of fiercely-roaring fire.

Even as he looked, the tree toppled over, and, dragging with it a part of the bank, fell with a crash across the lower level, sending up a gushing cloud of angry sparks and leaping tongues of flame, barring all passage. There was a hiss of steam from the water where the upper branches fell.

When the steam subsided, he saw that he might still force a way beyond the obstruction by wading his horse past the sunken branches. But he hesitated.

"I suppose I'm afraid," he told himself. "That's part of my cowardice. But I expect he's all right. I got him out of the tree where he was fixed—where he'd have been burnt to a cinder. I've left him in a safe place. He won't die. No," he decided, "I'm not going back—not now—not through that. Sergeant Silk said I was to follow my own instinct, and my instinct doesn't tell me to attempt the impossible."

He handed the reins to an Indian boy who

stood near minding a bunch of restless, panic-stricken ponies that had been brought down from the corrals. Then he strode away, feeling rather guilty in shirking an obvious duty.

Sergeant Silk rode towards him on the sweating broncho, halted, and looked down at him with red, swollen eyes.

"Those ponies would be useful to drag down the timber," Silk said hoarsely. "There's plenty of rope. Where's Denham, do you know? Oh, I see him. I won't take him away from what he is doing. Perhaps you would go along to Little Panther, at the far end of the village, and tell him to have that stack of corrugated iron brought down to the water. It's wanted."

"Corrugated iron?" Wingrove questioned wonderingly. "That won't float. It won't get burnt where it is."

"It is wanted," Sergeant Silk repeated. "And tell Little Panther that I have gone to Pascal's shack to see if he and his sick daughter are safe." He glanced along the lake shore to where the burning tree had just fallen, and beyond it to the projecting point of woodland where the fire swept down to the water's edge.

"Hold hard!" he demurred. "I see it's too late. I can't get through."

"Celeste Pascal is here with the Indian women," Roger Wingrove informed him. "Her father is safe, too."

He did not tell Sergeant Silk that it was he himself who had rescued the sick girl. He said no word of the man he had helped out of his perilous position in the tree. For one thing, Silk gave him no time to explain.

"Good," Silk nodded. "Then I'll go myself to look after the corrugated iron."

Wingrove saw him ride away, then ran to tell the Indians to get ropes, and use their horses for hauling the beams and joists that had been taken from the demolished huts. Afterwards he set to work helping Smooker and Pierre Adieu to make rafts.

They brought the floating logs side by side, five or six of them together; laying cross-beams and sacks of food over them to hold them together.

As soon as one was ready, Harvey Denham helped a few of the women and children on to it, and the heavily-loaded raft was pushed out by poles.

But many of the Indians who stood in the water away from the heat and the suffocating smoke, made a rush to the frail support. Their weight on the ends of the logs sent them apart; the whole contrivance collapsed, and the screaming passengers were flung into the water. They were rescued only with great difficulty, and the work had to be begun over again.

"Wait, Denham, wait!" cried Sergeant Silk, galloping up. "Come here a moment."

Harvey Denham hastened to his side.

"It's no good your trying to make those logs keep together that way," said Silk. "They must be fastened one to the other. There's no rope to spare; we shall want it all for towing them across. But I've got a better dodge. There's a lot of corrugated iron being brought down. Little Panther meant it for roofing the huts. It must serve another purpose now. Listen; you float three beams of timber together, and nail sheets of the iron on top of them. String a lot of them in line, so that they won't capsize, see?"

"I understand," signified Harvey. "You make decks of the sheet-iron, supported by logs

that will keep them afloat, then load them up and tow them across to the island."

"Exactly," Silk nodded. "There's a bagful of nails, and the nail holes are already there. It's simple, and it will be safe—if the rafts are not overloaded. Hullo!"

He flung a leg over the saddle, leapt to the ground, and ran limping to the water's edge. But Harvey Denham had seen what Silk had seen, and was in front of him, dashing into the lake and swimming outward.

A young Indian, sitting astride of a floating log and propelling it with his feet, had overbalanced himself, and was now struggling in deep water, held under by the weight of the log, to which one hand was clinging.

Silk plunged in, and swam with astonishing speed and strength. For a moment or two it was a neck and neck race; but Silk reached the log first, and grabbed at the Indian's hand, while Harvey seized the fellow behind the neck and raised his head above the surface. Between them they brought him to the shore.

Roger Wingrove had stood watching them.

"That's good!" he said to himself. "I wonder if I should have had the pluck to do

that if they hadn't been here? Perhaps not—perhaps not.”

A hand plucked at his sleeve just at the moment when the swimmers were starting back. He turned, and looked into the agitated face of the half-breed woman who had left her child in the hut.

“Look, then, m'sieu,” the woman pleaded piteously. “She 'ave not return, ze White Plume. It is that she not find ze *pauvre enfant*. It ees terrible!”

“Which hut did she go to?” Wingrove asked, coughing as a gust of smoke caught at his throat.

“Ze one which 'ave ze flame all roun',” the woman pointed. “M'sieu go, eh?”

Wingrove's teeth closed on his dry under-lip; he screwed up his painfully nipping eyes.

“It's no use,” he replied.

The woman's dark eyes shot a glance at him which was like the thrust of a knife.

“M'sieu ees pr'aps coward?” she said, with a nod of contempt. “Oh, well, I ask ze brave Sergeant Seelk. 'E go ver' queek.”

“You can leave Sergeant Silk alone,” Wingrove retorted, brushing past her.

He looked back to the water, and then up the slope to the burning hut. In spite of the scorching heat he was trembling. His heart was beating furiously against his ribs, and if he had known it, his lips had turned suddenly white.

"Coward?" he repeated. "Yes, I suppose she's right. Dare say she'll tell Silk what she thinks, too."

He drew a deep, long breath, bent his head, peering through the smoke and sparks at the blazing hut, and then started off at a run, leaping over the tufts of flaming scrub, kicking up a dust of smouldering charcoal at every step, ducking his head to escape the forks of fire that shot out at him as he raced past; never swerving, never faltering.

When he came near to the hut he saw that it was ringed round with fire. Thick black smoke was curling out by the broken window, smelling of burning tallow. The thatched roof was a glowing mass of fiercely crackling flames. He checked himself for an instant in front of a roaring furnace of burning faggots that hid the entrance, barring his way.

With a quick, calculating glance, he

measured the obstruction; then rushed at it, cleared it at a school-boy jump, and steadied himself to gaze in astonishment at White Plume standing in the doorway illumined by the flames that surged around her. It was not till afterwards that he realised how magnificent she looked at that moment in her dress of an Indian squaw.

“Quick! Quick! Come quick!” he cried.

“No,” she shook her head. “I cannot open the box without help. My fingers are burnt. And, oh, the little one will die!”

“Where is it? Show me!”

Wingrove went past her into the smoke-darkened room. She seized his arm, and led him to the box. He heard an infant’s stifled cry.

Feeling along the lid he found the hinge, caught at the flange with his finger-tips, and, exerting all his strength, wrenched the lid open. White Plume plunged her hands inside, and, lifting the crying child, ran with it to the door. There she hesitated before a wall of flame.

“This way!” cried Wingrove. He half-pushed, half-dragged her to the windward side of the blazing pile of faggots, found an open-

ing, and pushed her through in front of him, forcing her on and on until they came out upon a blackened stretch of ground where the fire had ceased to burn. "Straight ahead, now!" he urged her.

And she ran on, while he paused to take off his jacket and crush out the smoulder that had already eaten big holes in the back and sleeves.

"Silly woman, going shoving her kid in a box like that!" he said to himself as he ran. He did not see White Plume deliver the rescued child to its mother. But he knew that she was safe—that he had saved her life and the life of the child.

CHAPTER VI

VAMOOSSED!

“THEY going along all right, across there, Hen?”

Sergeant Silk moved his cold pipe from the grip of his teeth, and turned sleepy eyes upon the man who had run the nose of the canoe against the log on which he sat at the water's edge.

“Guess so.” Warburton shipped his dripping paddle, and leant over to lay hold of the projecting end of the log. “We'd a heap of trouble gettin' that last string of cattle ashore in the dark. One of 'em preferred the water, and made off in a bee-line across the lake. We've lost three ponies. A raft got spreadin' itself around, and a bag of sugar slipped through.”

“It will sweeten the lake,” said Silk. “Say, what did Little Panther think of my idea of getting his dogs to tow the rafts?”

"Said it was just great," Hen chuckled. "Said nobody but you'd have thought of it. They done their work a treat, too; same as if they'd been haulin' sleds over a snow trail. You comin' across thar? Say, you're 'bout played out, ain't you, Sergeant?"

"Do you figure there's any standing-room left?" Silk asked drowsily. Now that his work was over, he was feeling the strain of all that he had gone through. "That island wasn't made to accommodate such a crowd. Are many of the people badly burnt? Who's looking after them?"

"Thar's not many as I've heard of," Hen answered. "Nat'rally thar's many got scorched and disfigured. Thar's a considerable amount of wearin' apparel needin' repair. Smooker's busy collectin' grit out of folks' eyes. Young Denham's actin' as medical sup'rintendent, with a sack of flour and a roll of bandage, fixin' up blistered arms and legs as if he was a doctor. Guess you're needin' some 'doctorin' yourself, Sergeant, by the look of your uniform. That tunic might cut up to decorate moccasins. Dessay thar's enough of your pants left ter make a tobacco pouch. No self-respectin'

scarecrow'd be seen wearin' your Stetson hat. What's gotten wrong with your moustache? It's lopsided. You'll have to clip the other end away t' make it even."

"I'm sorry we couldn't save Little Panther's home lot," said Silk. He glanced round at the desolation. The land was glowing red under the darkness of the night sky and the drifting pall of smoke; flames leaped fitfully among the clumps of herbage and the ruined dwellings that were not yet wholly consumed. "We've not done much," he regretted. "Pity the wind didn't change an hour or two earlier."

"Thar's no lives lost, anyhow," Warburton reminded him. "That's suthin'. You shapin' ter rouse yourself and come along o' me to the island? Thar's nothin' to wait for. Little Panther has rigged up a wigwam for you. Thar's meat bein' roasted; thar's tea. That squaw of his—White Plume—she's busy makin' doughnuts for you. The hull crowd of 'em's hangin' around expectin' you. What are you waitin' for?"

"I am waiting for young Wingrove," Sergeant Silk explained. "He has gone along the lake in the other canoe. I've no notion what

for. That half-breed girl, Celeste Pascal, is on the island."

"Sure," nodded Warburton. "She was on the first raft. It was him as fetched her along from the shack."

"Indeed?" Silk looked up in surprise. "Who told him about the girl being there?"

"I did," said Hen. "He'd got mounted on that thoroughbred, so it was easy."

"It seems he hasn't been idle, then," remarked Silk. "Perhaps he has gone along to recover some of her belongings."

"Likely," agreed Warburton, "or try to."

Sergeant Silk rose stiffly to his feet. He saw Roger Wingrove approaching in the canoe.

"What made you come fooling along front of the engine?" he asked abruptly. "You might have been in the van with the rest of us. Did you know that I had a warrant for your arrest? Was that why you tried to keep out of my sight?"

"I had other reasons as well," Warburton murmured. "Thar was a chap along here I wanted to see. I hain't located him yet. Guess he vamoosed when the fire started."

"Then you knew that I was after you? You knew that you were suspected of having a hand in the stealing of that treaty money?"

"Suspected, yes. But I reckon I kin prove I'd nothin' to do with it—leastways, not in the stealin' of it."

"I shall be glad if you can establish your innocence," Silk nodded. "In the meantime, you may consider yourself my prisoner. Understand?"

"What, whether I'm guilty or not?"

"Why, certainly. I am not a magistrate to try you. I'm only a policeman. All I've got to do is to see you don't escape. Here is Wingrove. He doesn't shape extra well with that paddle, eh? You could teach him a thing or two about managing a Canadian canoe, couldn't you, Hen?"

"Sure," Warburton acknowledged. "But he's just a tenderfoot from back east, and not much of a one at that. Say, I heard a squaw woman call him a coward. And, come to think of it, he ain't shown a whole lot of that British pluck we hear about. What?"

"I have not been watching him," Silk said very quietly, thinking once again of what

Colonel Macpherson had told him of the officer cashiered for cowardice.

Roger Wingrove brought the canoe in with more skill than Sergeant Silk expected. He ran its nose well up the slope of the shingle, and stepped out lightly, with his burnt coat over a bare arm that was scarred and blistered. There were holes in his trousers; his cap was badly singed. He still wore the burnt and tattered sackcloth puttees that Silk had wrapped about his shins earlier in the day.

"I couldn't find what I went to look for," he said disconsolately. "He's not there, where I left him."

"He?" Silk interrogated. "Whom do you mean?"

Wingrove eased his coat from his smarting arm without disclosing the wound.

"Oh, a trapper that I found up a tree when I went to bring along a girl that this man told me of," Wingrove answered.

Silk looked at him through his screwed-up eyes, and saw the gaps made in his clothing by the flames.

"You were on horseback, I understand?" he said. "Was the shack—the hut—on fire?"

"No. I found the girl outside. She was ill, and I'd a bit of a difficulty getting her up in front of me, after I'd had a tussle looking after her father. He was the worst. I——" He paused. "Do you want to know about him?" he asked.

"~~Why~~, cert'nly, I want to know what on earth he was doing up a tree. You said he was up a tree, didn't you? I should have considered that the last refuge in a forest fire."

"But he wasn't taking refuge there," Wingrove explained. "He couldn't have got away. He was imprisoned in it, and he must have been there for hours and hours—a day or two, even. I can't imagine how he got there. He couldn't have climbed. There was nothing to climb up by. Anyhow, he'd got his right arm into a deep hole where the first branch forked out. His arm was caught, and there he hung suspended, while the fire crept nearer and nearer."

"Exactly," Silk nodded, growing interested. "How high was the hole from the ground?"

"Ten or twelve feet. His spurred boots were on a level with my saddle."

"Oh, I see," said Silk, very slowly and thoughtfully, as if he were solving a problem.

"Then his own horse had moved away when he stood on his saddle to shove his hand in the hole?"

Roger Wingrove looked up in sharp astonishment.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed. "That's the explanation of it! Of course, he must have been standing on a horse's back. Then when the horse went off, the fellow's arm was caught."

Sergeant Silk pressed a finger into the bowl of his pipe, then thrust the pipe into his empty pistol-holster.

"It seems probable," he said. "But what was he doing, anyhow, shoving his hand into that hole? Say, he wasn't gathering huckleberries up there."

"It was a stone-pine tree," Wingrove told him.

"And huckleberries grow on the ground," added Silk. "No, he wasn't gathering berries, nor inquiring into the domestic affairs of squirrels or coons. When you'd got him down, you didn't happen to imitate him, and feel for what he'd left there, I suppose? No, of course not. Your horse might have moved."

He turned to Hen Warburton, who had been listening very attentively.

"You got any sort of an idea what Theophile Pascal was hiding in that tree-hole, Hen?" he inquired. "Wasn't Pascal the chap you were so anxious to see when you hustled along here front of the engine?"

Hen Warburton was stroking his chin.

"Sure," he said. "But I'd learnt he wasn't along at his shack. Guess he must have been hangin' by his arm a matter of four-and-twenty hours at the least. As to what he was hidin' thar, well—I got a pretty consid'able notion as it was somethin' in the shape of dollar bills. And if that tree ain't burnt to the ground, I figure it's going to prove who stole that treaty money you mentioned awhile back."

"Exactly," nodded Silk, and, turning to Roger Wingrove, he said: "His arm was broken, of course? I conclude that he was unconscious. You must have had a tough job getting him down. What did you do with him? You didn't try to bring him along here?"

"No," Wingrove answered, wondering if Silk were blaming him for the omission. "I got him across the pommel and rode down with

him to the lake, dragged him across a strip of shallow water to a bit of an island there, and left him lying in the shelter of a rock. I've been back there now to look for him; and he's gone."

"Vamoosed!" added Warburton.

"Escaped!" rejoined Silk.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE FIRE

ROGER WINGROVE awoke at the touch of a hand on his painfully scorched left arm. He had slept in the Indian teepee which Little Panther had set apart for Sergeant Silk among the spruce and hickory trees on the sheltered side of the island, and now he opened his nipping, bloodshot eyes to see Harvey Denham kneeling near him with a roll of white bandage, a strip of lint, and a pannikin of flour held ready for surgical use.

“ Say, shall I dress that burnt arm of yours? ” Denham asked.

Wingrove flung aside the blanket that had covered him and sat up, staring about him wonderingly. Through the open door-flap of the dark wigwam he saw little groups of squaws busy around camp fires, where meat sizzled and kettles boiled, and beyond them the sun rising crimson through a bank of grey smoke that

drifted over the smouldering land across the lake.

"Thank you, Denham," he answered. "But you doctored it so well last night, I don't think it needs any attention just now. How long are we to be kept marooned on this island?"

"Not long, I expect," Harvey smiled. "We're lucky to have such a snug refuge. Of course, it will be days before Little Panther and his people can get back to clear away the mess over there and make camp again. But there's nothing to keep any of the rest of us hanging around. Pierre Adieu and I are going home to Gildersley's as soon as the railway track will allow the train to pass along. You see, we've left our ponies at Dunniker's Hope."

"Do you suppose the train will bring my luggage back?" Wingrove wondered. "I want a change of clothes. These are done for."

"Bound to," Denham assured him, looking down at his own bedraggled clothing. "We're all in the same box as far as that goes. Sergeant Silk will want a full outfit before he can show up on parade again."

Roger Wingrove glanced round at the place

where Sergeant Silk had slept, but saw only a very neat roll of blankets.

"He's up early," he said.

"He's been up quite a couple of hours," Harvey explained. "Even before daylight he was busy taking an inventory of the salvage, and towing horses across the lake. He's baking bread now, and waiting until you're ready to take a trip over in one of the canoes with him."

"Me?"

"Yes. He counts on your going to Crow's Head, I believe. That's why he took the horses over, for you and him to ride. Say, here's Pierre bringing some breakfast."

Pierre Adieu carried in the coarse-looking food on the bare lid of a packing-case.

"*B'jour, m'sieu,*" he said in greeting to Wingrove, bending to lower the improvised tray to the ground. "*Voilà!* We are all 'ungry; we eat, then. I mek not apology for ze food or ze way it is serve. What would you? We are not in hotel."

Sergeant Silk followed him within, walking very silently in moccasins, looking particularly tidy in spite of the burns and holes that disfigured his uniform. In one hand he carried

a steaming kettle, that gave forth the aroma of newly-made tea, and in the other an empty galley-pot for general use as a cup.

"Good-morning, Wingrove," he nodded. "Ready for some grub? That is not bear-steak that Pierre has brought in, but good Canadian beef. I made the dough cakes myself, and can recommend them. Denham tells me you singed your arm. Don't break the blisters. I've broken one on my trigger finger, and I allow it smarts. Say, Harvey, there's a police canoe coming racing down the lake. Guess it's Corporal Quick of the Maple Leaf Patrol. He can take my place, while I go off on another job."

He seated himself on the bundle of blankets that had been his bed, took a notebook from an inside pocket of his dilapidated tunic, and seemed about to write, but instead he tore a leaf out of the notebook and stood up, handing the slip of paper and a pencil to Roger Wingrove.

"Your fingers are not burnt," he said. "You can hold a pencil. Just jot down a report of this fire, will you, while I go out and forage for sugar?"

Wingrove took the writing materials.

"Do you mean me to do it off my own bat?" he questioned.

"Why, cert'nly. It's for Corporal Quick to take to headquarters."

He went out, and after a few minutes' absence returned with a handful of very dark brown sugar, which he emptied into the kettle and stirred with the blade of a knife.

"Let me have that report, Wingrove," he said, "and then we'll feed."

"But I've hardly begun it," Wingrove told him. "I haven't got out of the train yet, and I want more paper. This is filled, both sides."

"Gee!" exclaimed Silk. "What are you writing, a treatise? Say, we don't do it that way. Take another bit of paper, and put down what I dictate. Ready? Fire away, then—

"SIR,—I have the honour to report that owing to the carelessness of one Charles Smooker, now in custody, a serious fire has occurred in the forest adjoining Little Panther's section on Dead Moose Lake. Railroad and telegraph connections were interrupted, and some seventy acres of standing

crops destroyed. Volunteers from Dunniker's Hope gave valuable help in transferring the inhabitants and their movable property into safety without loss of life.

"I have the honour to be your obedient servant.

"Thank you, Wingrove," Silk concluded, awkwardly adding his signature.

They had just finished breakfast when Corporal Quick entered, dressed in his service uniform of khaki. Wingrove, Denham, and Pierre left the two men alone in the wigwam, and watched one of the Indians getting a canoe ready.

Across the water they could see a pair of saddled horses grazing on a tiny patch of grass that the fire had spared. While they waited they heard the shrill whistle of an engine, and presently a short train came into sight round a curve, moving very slowly through the charred stumps of the forest trees.

At the sound of the whistle Sergeant Silk came out from the teepee. He had borrowed Corporal Quick's bandolier and revolver, and had fastened his spurs on the heels of his boots.

"All right, then, Quick," he said, as he strode down to the water's edge. "If you'll stay here and straighten things out a bit, I'll quit and see if I can pick up that chap's trail." He laid a hand on Wingrove's shoulder. "You will come with me, Wingrove," he intimated. "I want you to show me that tree you spoke of. Then we can make a track round to the train. Sam Kentish can't go any farther than where he dropped us."

Wingrove followed him into a canoe, and Little Panther himself paddled them across to where Eagle's Wing waited with the horses.

"Little Panther would like to do his friend a good turn," said the Indian, pausing when they were halfway across. "He would like to go on the trail with him and help him. He knows many things. He knows that the man who has escaped is not alone."

"Is that so?" said Silk.

Little Panther continued working at his paddle.

"Yes," he went on. "Poundmaker is with him. They are as brothers. Poundmaker is a bad Indian. He is the white man's enemy. He would drive the white settlers away, and

have no Mounted Police riding on the trails. He would have the buffalo come back to the plains, and live as his fathers lived. Three sleeps ago he came to the camp of Little Panther and told him these things."

"Oh, indeed?" Sergeant Silk raised his eyebrows in surprised interest. "The rascally rebel! And he wanted you to join him, I suppose?"

"It is so," Little Panther responded.

Sergeant Silk looked round at Roger Wingrove.

"Say, Wingrove, my boy," he smiled, "if you have a serious notion of wearing the red coat it's likely there's some active service in store for you. How should you like to take part in a headlong charge against a tribe of yelling Redskins, all togged out in their feathers and warpaint, and eager for your scalp?"

Wingrove made no answer, and Silk did not seem to expect one, but turned again to Little Panther, fixing his eyes inquiringly on the Indian's inscrutable face.

"Poundmaker and Theophile Pascal are friends, then?" he said.

"They are as brothers," Little Panther repeated.

"Ah!" Silk nodded. "That accounts for something. I am obliged to you for your information, Little Panther. What you have said gives me a lot to think about."

He was silent for the rest of the short journey over the lake. When they landed, the two horses were brought up, and Silk and Wingrove mounted, Silk taking the white broncho.

"You shall have your horses back in a day or two," he said, as he bent over to take the Indian's hand in farewell.

But Little Panther shook his head.

"They are yours," he protested.

Sergeant Silk laughed.

"They're the wrong colour," he objected. "And the Riders of the Plains take no reward for their services. But it may be that my young friend here has no such objection." He glanced at his companion. "What say, Wingrove, will you accept a present of one of these horses from Little Panther? Remember, an Indian does not like to have his gifts refused."

Roger Wingrove shook his head.

"Then I'm afraid I must offend him," he answered.

"Good," Silk nodded. And when they had ridden a few paces away, he added: "I am glad you refused that horse, Wingrove. You will have to refuse many such gifts if you join the Police. Let me see how you can clear that burnt tree that's lying in front of us."

The fire had burnt itself out along the shores of the lake, and there was now no difficulty making a way. Wingrove gripped his saddle between his knees and urged his mount to a gallop, clearing the obstruction very neatly.

"Guess you'll do," Silk told him. "But any tenderfoot could ride a horse like yours. I must see you wrestling with a bucking broncho. Do you think you can locate that tree—or what remains of it? Hustle along, and have a look for it."

Roger Wingrove rode on in advance, until he came within sight of the blackened ruins of Pascal's hut. Everything around was changed. Where green trees and bushes had been there was now only a confused mass of charred *débris*, from which the trunks of the

forest monsters stood up gaunt and bare. He could not find the footpath, and only vaguely guessed at his direction.

He went on slowly, searching from side to side in the black devastation, and at last he was forced to own to himself that he was defeated.

"Well?" said Sergeant Silk, riding up to him.

"I can't find it," Wingrove admitted. "Everything's altered."

"Exactly," said Silk. "But you said it was a stone-pine. Most of these are spruce and larch and cottonwood. You passed a group of stone-pines. Suppose you turn back and have a look at them? Don't give it up. We've got to find that tree if we spend a week searching for it."

Wingrove bit his lip in vexation at his failure. He had already begun to think that he had come too far.

Sergeant Silk drew aside, and returned by a separate way, searching on his own account. He was not considering the direction which Wingrove might have mistaken; he was quartering the ground, and examining every

possible tree stump at the height of ten or twelve feet from the root.

At last he drew to a halt beside one that looked likely. A neighbouring tree had fallen against it, breaking down its lower branches.

Silk brought his horse closer, clutched at an overhanging limb with both hands, and touched the horse's flank with a spur, pulling the branch aside and fixing it.

"Guess this is the one," he said to himself. He looked round for Wingrove, and saw him a fair way off. "Yes, there's a hole up there," he decided, forcing his horse nearer, and crushing down the pile of charred timber. "Steady!"

He dropped the bridle-rein over the broncho's neck, and raised himself to his knees on the saddle, holding on to the hanging branch. Very cautiously he pulled himself up until he stood with his feet on the horse's crupper.

"Steady—steady!" he repeated.

The horse did not move; but even if it had done so, Silk's weight was supported by the branch and the strength of his right arm. He lifted his feet and got his knees against the

trunk, then thrust his left hand into the hole. The blistered fingers of his other hand pained him; but he held on grimly, and presently drew forth a small parcel. As he did so, the branch gave a loud crack and broke off. Silk fell between the tree and the startled broncho, which dashed away, leaving him struggling to liberate himself, with his uniform torn and his limbs badly scratched.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAMP VISITOR

ROGER WINGROVE captured the white broncho and waited with it, wondering what had happened to its rider. But presently he heard his name called. He caught a gleam of the sergeant's red tunic and discovered the sergeant himself, seated on the edge of a boulder busily examining something that lay across his knees.

"Say, I've found what we were looking for," Silk informed him, when he went up. "The treaty money's here all right, and the knife as well."

"The knife?" Wingrove repeated.

"Yes." Sergeant Silk covered the weapon with the cloth it had been wrapped in. "You see, it was a case of robbery with violence. A trooper—one of the Mounted Police—was taking the money for distribution among the Indians on the Day Star Reserve, when he was set upon by a gang of road agents one night

while he slept. He didn't live to give a description of any of them; but Pascal, the man you rescued from the tree, was the ring-leader, and Pascal has got to be caught, see? If you'll show me the place where you dumped him, it's possible we can get on his trail."

Roger Wingrove led the way down to the lake, and they waded their horses across to the little islet.

"It was just here, under the shelter of this rock," Wingrove pointed out.

"Not a bad place," said Silk. "The fire couldn't have reached him, and naturally you only thought of the fire. You were in a hurry, too, wanting to save the girl. So you didn't happen to notice the Indian watching you from his canoe."

Wingrove looked sharply into the sergeant's face.

"How do you make that out?" he questioned.

Sergeant Silk pointed down to a strip of sand at the water's edge, and to a mark on its otherwise smooth surface.

"That groove in the sand was made by the prow of a canoe," he explained. "Look closer

and you'll see the impressions of moccasined feet. That's where the Indian got out. There are other footmarks, pointing the opposite way. They're considerably deeper. I calculate that the Indian was carrying something heavy—an unconscious man, for example."

"Pascal?"

"Why, cert'nly. Who else? So you see, our man was carried away in the canoe, and as a canoe leaves no trail on the water, it won't be an easy matter to track it. What? Well, we've found out something definite, haven't we? We can't find any more just here. Come, I think I know a short cut to the railroad. Little Panther's wheat patch will be cold by now, and we can cross it at a gallop."

Their way across the corner of the forest was difficult. Fallen trees and half-burnt branches barred their passage, and in many places the fire still smouldered, sending up jets of flame. The horses' hoofs turned up glowing clods of turf and charcoal at every step.

But where the charred straw of the burnt-up cornfield lay deep on the ground, progress was easy enough. It was, as Silk said, only like riding through a mush of black snow.

Beyond the devastated cornfield there was another strip of forest, where the fire had turned the majestic trees into ugly black stumps and bare masts, and the fallen boughs made a tangled barrier difficult to penetrate.

Sergeant Silk pushed through to the railway cutting, however, and it was not long before he came upon a gang of platelayers at work clearing the line and laying new metals in place of those that were buckled. The locomotive and brake van waited near, and the two riders dismounted and climbed into the van.

There Roger Wingrove changed his clothes and boots, leaving his hold-all and rugs to be taken on by the train to Crow's Head.

"You look as if you intended coming along with me, then," said Silk, seeing him buckling on a pair of spurs. "Well, all right. You may as well bring an overcoat and a rug in case we've got to sleep under the stars. You can wear Corporal Quick's bandolier and revolver, since I've now got my own. When you're ready, we'll quit."

"I suppose you're going first of all on the track of Pascal, aren't you?" Wingrove asked as they rode away.

“Exactly!” said Silk. “I’m going to take you into an Indian encampment to introduce you to the Redskin chief who fancies he’s able to clear Canada of the Paleface and bring the buffaloes back.”

Beyond the area of the forest fire they crossed a wide stretch of open prairie, that sloped upward to the hills. At noon they came to a small cattle ranch, where they rested and got food, and where Silk filled his haversack and borrowed a small kettle and other necessities.

At sundown they were in the midst of a dense forest, and there, beside a stream, they lighted their bivouac fire and made camp for the night.

Wingrove had never before slept in the open air, and the strange sounds of the forest disturbed him.

In the middle of the night he was awake, sitting up and staring into the fire, when he started, and began to tremble at the sound of rustling leaves, a panting breath, and the tread of an animal’s feet behind him.

The horses moved restlessly, but Sergeant Silk slept on.

Turning very slowly, Wingrove looked round, and a shiver went through him as he saw a pair of glittering eyes and a long, red tongue, and a shadowy form behind them. He felt for his revolver.

"Sergeant!" he cried aloud. "Here's a wolf!"

Sergeant Silk sat up.

"Give him that bone," he said drowsily.

At the sound of his voice the animal went up to him, wagging a bushy tail, and lifting great paws to his shoulders.

"My hat!" cried Silk in astonishment. "Why, it's Herschel—my good old sled-dog, Herschel! Where in thunder did you come from, boy? Got on your master's trail, did you? Well, I'm glad to see you again. Lie down. Don't eat me. Lie down, and let me finish my sleep. But I don't wonder at your taking him for a wolf, Wingrove. His father was one, I guess. Still, he's a dog, and a good one. Many a hundred mile has he travelled with me across the snow on the lone Arctic trails!"

On the following morning, when Wingrove awoke he found himself alone with the two

horses. New fuel had been added to the fire, and the kettle had been filled and left with a packet of tea and sugar beside it, together with four rashers of bacon already spitted on forks of birchwood.

He supposed that Sergeant Silk would not be absent very long, and he proceeded to prepare the breakfast. But it was fully an hour before the sergeant and the dog returned, both bearing the evidence of having been for a swim.

Silk was very quiet while he ate. It was not until he had lighted his pipe that he volunteered any information as to where he had been,

"We were right about the canoe, Wingrove," he then said. "I have just seen it on the lake down there, where Herschel and I went to have a wash. Poundmaker himself was at the paddle, with Theophile Pascal as his passenger. There's a second canoe, with two Indians in it. We've got to deal with them, see? They will come ashore and break a trail through these trees, on their way to the village, and they'll come very soon. Put out the fire. Tie up the dog. And when you see anything, keep your

head and your temper, and don't shoot till you know there's no other way."

The policeman and his companion waited in silence. Roger Wingrove held the dog by a leash of trail rope. Silk put away his pipe and slid the revolver round in his belt, leaning with his broad shoulders against a tree, listening to every sound. Presently the dog growled where it lay, with muzzle on outstretched paws.

"Quiet, Herschel!" said Silk, going forward a step.

Through the green glade in front of him four men swung into view, walking in single file, a tall, blanketed Indian leading with a Winchester in the crook of his arm, a half-breed with a lame arm behind him, and then two braves, each carrying a rifle.

Sergeant Silk strode forward, stopped, saluted, and the leader's Winchester came out from the folds of his blanket with its shining barrel levelled towards Silk's red tunic.

Wingrove began to feel sick, for he knew that ten-shot automatic rifle, and he saw Sergeant Silk walking straight up to it boldly, unhesitatingly. What he did not see was the wavering look in the Indian's eyes.

Poundmaker's breath quivered, he lowered his weapon, swerved, ran off, and Silk turned like a flash and leapt after him among the trees.

Roger Wingrove felt a sudden tug at the leash. For an instant he held the dog in check, then with a gasp of understanding he loosened the leash, and the animal shot across the clearing in pursuit.

With shaking hand the boy jerked forward his revolver and covered the three men.

The two Indians had flung their rifles along their wrists; the half-breed was weaponless. All three of them stood still with eyes directed to the gleaming barrel of the revolver and the finger that trembled on the trigger.

CHAPTER IX

BAD MEDICINE

WINGROVE was too excited to be conscious of physical fear. Bending forward like a boxer sparring for an opening, he advanced a step, still covering the three men, his revolver ranging from one to the other.

He saw the two Indians shrink back and move as if to avoid the threatening bullet. He did not know that, although Indians fight hard and fiercely for their lives and for victory in a combined charge, yet they are little better than cowards when they come to stand in front of a loaded gun levelled at them by the unerring hand of a white man. When the hammer should fall and the little ring of bright steel spit forth its fire, the bullet would not miss its mark, and each knew that he himself might be the one to fall.

To Roger Wingrove it seemed that many minutes of dread suspense went by while he

held the heavy weapon raised at arm's length in front of him.

He knew that unless one of those two savages should aim at him he was not going to pull his own trigger. He was only keeping them at bay. All the time he was remembering Sergeant Silk's cautioning words—

“Don't shoot till you know there's no other way.”

While he stood confronting the three of them, he heard the dog's savage snarl from far in among the trees. There was the sound as of a blow, then a gun-shot, followed by a cry and the dog's fiercely worrying growls and snarls and snaps.

What was happening in there behind the concealing bushes? He dared not turn his eyes to look; he kept them steadily fixed upon the three men in front of him.

They, too, had heard those ominous sounds. Their chief was fighting for his life, calling for help.

The two Indians wheeled round and ran off towards the timber, leaving their half-breed companion standing defenceless in the clearing.

Pascal's broken arm was held close against

his chest, supported in the opening of his blue flannel shirt. His feet, with their high-heeled boots and long cowboy spurs, were moving restlessly in the grass, his furtive dark eyes betrayed the fear that was agitating him. He turned to follow the two braves.

"Stay where you are!" commanded Roger Wingrove.

Lowering his weapon, he strode forward a few paces.

"What for I obey you?" the half-breed sullenly objected. "It ees not your affair. I go my own way, then."

"Stay where you are," Wingrove repeated, again raising his revolver threateningly.

He stood listening anxiously. If Pound-maker and the two braves should come out from among the trees, and Sergeant Silk remain behind, what was to be done? He could not hope to defend himself successfully against three desperate savages.

Here, truly, was a situation to test his courage.

He glanced quickly at the two waiting horses. It might not be impossible to run back to them, leap into the saddle of the nearest—the white

broncho—and ride off. He seriously considered the possibility, while still he waited and watched, fearing that Sergeant Silk had been overmastered and perhaps killed.

The suspense was terrible. His heart was beating furiously against his ribs; he went hot and cold by turns, his breath came in short, uneven gasps.

At last the tension was broken. The snapping of a dry twig caused him to look sharply aside, and he saw Sergeant Silk walking unconcernedly towards Theophile Pascal, carrying Poundmaker's Winchester.

The half-breed had evidently expected some one else, and at sight of the policeman's uniform he shrank back with a suppressed cry, and started off at a run.

"Halt!" cried Silk, dropping the gun; and his voice sounded like a pistol shot.

Pascal ran on very feebly, staggering in his gait, and he had not gone far before Silk's hand gripped at his belt and stopped him.

The half-breed struggled to get free, and in doing so fell forward with his whole weight on his broken arm. Silk left him lying there

moaning and turned away, nursing his blistered fingers.

"Herschel is mounting guard over Pound-maker," he told Roger Wingrove. "I have sent the two braves to the encampment for a couple of ponies to carry our prisoners. Keep your eye on Pascal in case he has a notion to sneak off. I'll see to his broken arm presently when the pain quits my fingers and we've fixed up the chief. Fetch that gun that I dropped."

"Did Herschel do any good?" Wingrove inquired, laying the rifle on top of the blankets. He was anxious to know whether he had done right to let the dog loose.

Silk was pressing his sore hand tightly in his armpit. His face showed how acute was the pain.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I guess he saved my life, if that's anything."

He did not volunteer any information as to what had happened, or who had fired the shot, and Wingrove was left to make his own inferences, when Silk, having tied Pascal's ankles together with a rope, led the way in amongst the brushwood.

Poundmaker sat with his back against a maple tree, looking very dejected. His wrists were manacled together with a pair of shining steel handcuffs. One of his buckskin leggings was ripped open at the fringed seam, and his bared leg was bleeding from an ugly wound in the calf, which showed a double row of teeth marks. The big, wolf-like dog stood in front of him, growling ominously whenever he attempted to move.

"That's all right, Herschel." Silk laid a caressing hand on the animal's head. "You can quit guarding him now, for a while." And to Poundmaker he added: "You will come with me."

The Indian chief looked up with a sullen scowl on his dusky, wrinkled face.

"Wough!" he grunted. "Bad medicine. No; no go longa you. Me plenty good Indian—no steal horse, no take scalp, no drink fire-water; gone done no bad. Why?"

Sergeant Silk stooped down with his hands on his knees, scrutinising the Indian's bitten leg.

"I am not accusing you of any of those particular crimes, old man," he said quietly.

"I am only telling you that you are coming with me. Say, now, you'll need some sort of bandage on that leg of yours. I don't count on any danger from hydrophobia." He bent lower and dexterously removed the handcuffs. "I'll relieve you of the bracelets," he went on, thrusting them deep into a back pocket of his tunic.

He helped Poundmaker to his feet, and led him limping back into the clearing, followed by Roger Wingrove and the dog. The Indian and the half-breed were brought side by side.

"See what you can do about those dog bites, while I look after the broken arm," Silk instructed. "There's some balsam trees at the back of you. Get some of the juice if you can find any, and use it as an ointment. You've heard of the curing properties of Canadian balsam, haven't you?"

Wingrove had brought a clean handkerchief with him from the train, and now he cut it into strips for bandage, and set about the work of bathing the Indian's injured leg with warm water, adjusting the torn skin, spreading some of the resinous balsam on a pad of the cambric,

and binding the strips of bandage very neatly round the limb.

"I thought Red Indians were supposed to bear any amount of pain without flinching," he remarked, seeing Silk watching him. "But this chap doesn't show much Spartan endurance."

"You'll discover that a good deal you've heard and read about Indians is sheer bunkum," said Silk. "I see you're making a decent job of that. Go on. Cover it well, so that he won't get any dirt into the wound. Then come here, ready to help."

He had cut away the shirt-sleeve from Pascal's swollen arm, and was feeling for broken bones. Wingrove saw that the skin was bruised.

"The shoulder is dislocated," declared Sergeant Silk. "The radius and ulna are fractured, and I guess the tendons are badly strained. Take your knife to that soft maple—the tree with the crimson leaves—and cut me some splints."

Pascal was lying at full length on a bed of fern while this examination was proceeding, and he moaned at every touch.

"You're going to feel worse pain presently

when I set your shoulder," he was told. "A surgeon would put you under chloroform, but you'll have to bear it. What did you go fooling about that tree for, anyhow, getting your arm fixed in it?"

Pascal opened his dark eyes in astonishment.

"So, then, it was you who tek me down from ze tree?" he exclaimed.

"You might have found many a better hiding-place for that stolen treaty money," said Silk.

"*Sapristi!*" cried the half-breed in alarm, "you find it, *hein?*"

"It is in my possession at this moment," Sergeant Silk informed him, tapping the front of his tunic, "and it may interest you to know that I also have the knife that you used. So you see there is plenty of evidence against you."

"Wough!" muttered Poundmaker, who heard and understood. "Bad medicine!"

Silk turned sharply round upon him.

"You're a nice pair, both of you," he said. "I guess you've been counting on that money, haven't you, Poundmaker? You wanted it

badly—wanted it to buy guns and powder, kill more policemen, drive Paleface out of the land, bring buffalo back. A pretty scheme, from your point of view, but it's not going to come off—not this time."

"Huh!" breathed the Indian, betraying his concern at this implied charge of treachery. He darted an accusing glance at the half-breed. "Poundmaker thinks his friend has a forked tongue," he said in the language of the Crees. "He has been telling the things which should have been hidden. He is a woman. He is not a man. He cannot keep a secret. Wough!"

Theophile Pascal made no response. His dark face was twisted up as a spasm of acute pain shot through him. Sergeant Silk had planted a foot against his shoulder, had gripped the thick of his injured arm in his two hands and was pulling at it with all his strength. Pascal screamed in his agony, but the shoulder joint slipped into its socket, and Silk stood back, panting with the exertion.

"Yes, that ought to do," he said to Wingrove, who came up to him whittling at a small branch of maple wood. "Cut it smooth and flat on the inside. We shall want two like that. We can

use his shirt-sleeve for a bandage, bound round with rope, and his scarf will do for a sling."

He was occupied for a long time in setting the fractured bones and fixing the splints, but he worked with the skill and tenderness of a surgeon, and Roger Wingrove never forgot the lesson that he learnt in watching him.

CHAPTER X

THE BUGLE CALL

SERGEANT SILK lighted his pipe and strolled meditatively across the sunlit glade to the shadows of the trees. He signed to Roger Wingrove to accompany him, and, leaving the dog on guard over the two prisoners, they strode together to a grassy bank at the side of the stream.

"Have you set your mind on going to Crow's Head Pass, Wingrove?" Silk casually inquired, seating himself on the bank. "There's no hotel there, you know. There's no dwelling of any sort, except a Hudson's Bay trading post and a hut where a patrol of the police hang out. What's your object?"

Wingrove idly plucked at a small blue berry growing among the short herbage and crushed it between his fingers, looking in surprise at the rich crimson juice.

"We call them huckleberries," Silk smiled.

"They're nice to eat. Try some. What's your notion going to Crow's Head?"

"I was going there to see a man I know," Wingrove answered; "a man who was in my father's regiment. He's in the Mounted Police. I wanted to get his advice about joining. Perhaps you know him—Sir James Rushmere?"

"Guess so." Silk puffed reflectively at his pipe. "But we don't give a whole lot of thought to titles in the Force. He's known along the trails as Bunny Rushmere. He's such a 'cute little rabbit. And so your father is a soldier, is he?"

Roger Wingrove's eyes were bent upon the sergeant's boots.

"He was one," he answered, without looking up. "But——"

"Yes?" Silk laid a hand on his knee to cover a hole in the cloth of his trousers where the flames had burnt it.

"But he had to send in his papers," Wingrove went on, as if he were confessing a crime. "He was court-martialled for cowardice."

Sergeant Silk sat upright.

"Say, you needn't tell me about it, if it hurts you," he said gently.

Wingrove raised his eyes then and looked into the clear blue eyes of the man facing him.

"But I want you to know," he pursued. "It's only right that you should know that I'm the son of a coward—that I am myself a coward. You must have noticed already that I'm a coward. When you waited for me to jump out of the train that time and follow you into the flames, I was afraid—mortally afraid. Later, one of those Indian squaws called me a coward, because I shrank from going up to one of the burning huts to save her kid. She was right, too. I was trembling with fear, and——"

He broke off, wondering if Silk had by chance heard that he had gone in spite of his fears.

"That's nothing," Silk interposed. "Heaps of men feel the same. The bravest man I ever knew turned white as a sheet before he rode off to his heroic 'death. Guess that child you referred to was the one that White Plume carried down from the burning hut. What?"

"Yes," Wingrove nodded, adding no word of what he himself had done to save both

White Plume and the child. "But you see," he continued quickly, "what my father did, or refused to do, wasn't a thing like that. He committed a military offence. It was in Kashmir. There was a detachment of British soldiers besieged in a hill fort, surrounded by the enemy, and he was detailed to lead his company to their relief, and—and he didn't go."

"I see." Sergeant Silk blew a cloud of tobacco smoke into the midst of the mosquitoes circling about his head. "I see," he repeated, "he didn't go." Then after a moment's silence he added curiously: "I suppose you are certain that this story is true? There was no doubt about his neglect of duty?"

Roger Wingrove shrugged his shoulders.

"He was dismissed from the Army, anyhow," he answered, "so his cowardice must have been proved."

"Yet it doesn't follow that you, his son, are necessarily a coward also," Silk argued. "And in any case, your father's alleged cowardice would be no obstacle to your joining the Red Patrol, if that is your serious resolve. You had better come with me to headquarters at

Regina, and try your luck. As it happens, there's no use in your going to Crow's Head. Bunny Rushmere isn't there. He has gone to Regina, where we shall find him sure enough when we take these two prisoners in."

A deep growl from the dog drew his glance across the clearing. Poundmaker was not in the position in which he had been left. He was crawling like a snake along the ground towards his gun. His hand was stretched out to seize the weapon.

Silk rose to his feet, drawing his revolver. Swiftly and silently he went forward. The Indian turned to fire at him, but snarled when he saw that the sergeant had already got him covered.

"It's no good, old man," Silk called out. "Drop that gun! Back, Herschel; back," he continued, speaking to the dog.

The dog, crouched to leap upon the Indian, lay down, still showing his fangs; and Poundmaker looked disappointedly round into the bush where his two braves were approaching with a pair of ponies.

Silk returned his revolver to its holster at his belt.

"We may as well make a start now," he said to Roger Wingrove. "We shall get as far as Battleford to-night."

They packed their camp outfit, mounted their two prisoners, and themselves got astride of their stock saddles; and so, with the dog following on their trail, they set off on their three hundred mile journey to the south-east by way of Battleford and Saskatoon, where they crossed the great Saskatchewan river to the prairies and the shores of Last Mountain Lake, and on until at length they saw the Union Jack floating over the low roofs of Regina and heard the faint, clear cry of a bugle from the barrack yard.

"Say, Pierre, what was that? Did you hear something?"

Harvey Denham rested his two heavy milk-pails on the snowy ground and stood with the evening sunlight shining on his cold reddened face. Pierre Adieu, walking in front of him across the corral, stopped and looked round at him.

"You 'ave ver' good 'earing, 'Arve." The half-breed also put down his pails. "For

myself, I 'ear only ze crunch of our feet in ze snow. You mek excuse for rest, per'aps. You find ze meelk-pails 'eavy?"

Harvey shook his head.

"They're hardly as heavy as usual," he responded. "I heard a kind of crackling of ice down there by the willows."

"Zere was many bull-frog down by ze creek," Pierre reminded him,

"Oh, it wasn't any bull-frog," Harvey denied. "It was a louder sound than a dozen frogs could make. Dare say it was that coyote we saw prowling around the hen-house. We ought to lay a trap for that gentleman. Anyhow, I'm going to have a scout round. I'm plumb sure it was some biggish animal. Joe saw the tracks of a cinnamon bear yesterday."

"*Eh bien*," said Pierre. "We both go, then. Why not?"

They left their pails and tramped across the crisp snow, climbed the corral stockade, and made their way downward to the creek. Harvey came to an abrupt stop within a few yards of the leafless willows.

"Wait here while I crawl to the edge of the bank," he cautioned.

Pierre watched him, and saw him searching, leaning over against the support of a tree and looking down upon the ice. Presently Harvey stood up and waved a beckoning hand.

"Well?" said Pierre, going up to him.

Harvey pointed downward.

"See that crack in the ice?" he whispered.

"See that broken twig? What are those marks going right along on the snow?"

"*Tiens!*" muttered Pierre. "It seem 'e no want be seen, that man."

"He's been here spying on our corrals," Harvey added. "You could count the ponies from here. Guess that's what he's been doing. And he wasn't a white man. He wore moccasins. Look at his footmarks."

"So," nodded Pierre. "You mek no meestek. Also, where zere is one Hindian, 'e sure 'ave companions."

Suddenly Harvey Denham dropped on his knees, dragging the half-breed down with him into the shelter of a projecting piece of the bank.

"Look!" he whispered, pointing along the creek. "Keep quiet and look!"

They crouched together, peering out upon

the lower level of the nearer bank. Both saw something moving stealthily, quickly, as if to get out of sight.

It was the half-bent figure of a man, an Indian, wearing a white blanket which could hardly be distinguished against the whiteness of the snow. For some moments he disappeared, and the two watchers rose from their ambush and ran nearer. Then again the Indian revealed himself, this time mounted on a white horse, galloping away.

"Seems he has got what he wanted," said Harvey Denham, "and he's off now to give his report. We'd best get back home and tell Joe Gildersley and the boys to make ready. I've seen signs of Indians for days past. So has Joe. That's why Joe has had the ponies rounded up and corralled. That's why he had the stockade strengthened and the guns cleaned. We shall need those guns."

"But, *mon cher* 'Arvey," protested Pierre, "you tek alarm too easy. It ees nothing, one solitary scout; and in winter ze Hindian 'e go not on ze warpath, never!"

"Poundmaker isn't like other Indians," declared Harvey.

"Poundmaker ees already in prison," returned Pierre. "'E was arrest by Sergeant Silk."

"He was released three weeks ago," pursued Harvey, "and he has been busy ever since. I heard the men talking about it at Thirty Mile Bend. He's getting the whole Cree nation together, and a crowd of half-breeds to help him to drive the white settlers and the Mounted Police away, and they're stealing horses wherever they can find them. They've found ours, and you may bet your socks they mean to have them."

They hastened back to the homestead and came upon Joe Gildersley cutting down a tree. Harvey went up to him.

"Why are you doing this?" he inquired. "We're not short of firewood."

"I just notioned it had better come down," said Joe. "Y'see, it kinder obstructs the view from the windows. You can't see what's going on."

"That's so," agreed Harvey. "And a whole gang of Indians might hide behind it and fire into the house."

"Injuns?" repeated Joe. "What's your

meanin'? Got any ideas 'bout their payin' us a call?"

"Sure," returned Harvey. "One of their scouts has just been spying around our horse corrals. That means something."

Joe whistled.

"And we're short-handed! Why, thar's not more'n half-a-dozen men on the ranch can handle a gun!" He dropped his axe and turned towards the house door. "Guess we'd best be gettin' busy," he said grimly.

While daylight lasted every one on the ranch was occupied in the work of strengthening the defences and preparing to resist the expected raid. Even the coming of darkness did not interrupt their operations, and at midnight they were ready, or as ready as their limited resources would permit.

Joe Gildersley and Harvey Denham kept watch while the others slept. From the verandah they could see, far away in the direction of Dead Man's Gap, the faint, flickering glow of the Indians' camp fires. At earliest dawn they stood together listening and searching with keen eyes across the wide stretches of snow.

"Do you hear something?" Harvey questioned, touching Joe's elbow. "Hoofs?"

"Um," said Joe. "What d'you make of that dark kinder shadow movin' over the brow of the hill back of the stubble field?"

"It's them," said Harvey. "It's them, sure. They're coming!"

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST SHOT

HARVEY DENHAM had no need to run down to the bunkhouse to give the alarm. The men had been on the alert all through the night, and they had discovered the first signs that the early dawn revealed of the approaching Indians.

They were already prepared, each with a loaded rifle, a brace of revolvers, and a supply of cartridges. They had locked and double-barred the door, and barricaded the windows of the stables, where Gildersley's saddle-horses were kept; and now they were only waiting until the Redskins should show themselves within range, when they would open fire upon them.

"Are you all ready, George?" Harvey quietly asked, striding unconcernedly up to the foreman on the clearing in front of the bunkhouse.

"You bet," George answered him, with equal

coolness. "We've been ready hours. Pierre located them awhile back, movin' blotches of black on the snow, breakin' a trail over the brow of the hill yonder. There's a good handful of 'em, Harve; a good handful. It ain't goin' ter be a pleasure picnic."

"Forty or fifty," Harvey estimated. "We can't do much against them."

"More than if they'd took us unawares, though," George added. "Seems you was plumb right about that scout. I'm figurin' they'll pull up and dismount back of the poplar bluff. Then they'll cross the creek, and sneak up through the saskatoon and birches, keepin' well hid. Nat'rally, they'll make first for the corrals. It's horses they're mostly coveting. They ain't hankering after takin' our scalps."

"I'm not so sure about that," Harvey demurred. "They're out on the warpath, any how. They're planning to exterminate the white settlers, or to drive us away. They've been having sun-dances, and that means a lot. Suppose they divide their forces, and attack the homestead as well as stampede the horses—what then?"

George rubbed his chin through his short beard.

"I've thought of that possibility," he responded. "In that case, of course, we concentrate on the homestead. Where's the boss?"

"On the watch, front of the house, where he's been 'most all the night."

"And the two women—Mrs. Gildersley and Martha?"

"They're busy indoors. They'll keep the guns loaded up. They'll look after any of us that are hurt. The sitting-room's like a surgery and a shooting gallery combined. Where have you posted the boys?"

George indicated the men's stations.

"Barney O'Neill's back of the wood-stack with Pierre," he explained. "Tulloch and Mitchell are on scout duty around the corrals, with Charlie and Alf. The rest of 'em are hangin' around within call for when the music begins. First one as locates a Redskin gives the signal to start. You kin tell Joe we're all awake and tuned up ter concert pitch. He needn't worry, none."

Harvey returned to the gate of the high

stockade surrounding the house. The gate was not yet barred, and he entered. Crossing the intervening strip of garden, he found Joe Gildersley seated on the verandah steps, nursing his Winchester, while he drank from a cup of hot coffee.

"Come inside, Harve, and get some breakfast," said Mrs. Gildersley, appearing in the doorway. She wore a man's belt, from which the butt of a revolver protruded. Her arms were bared to the elbow. She looked very determined and businesslike. This was not her first experience of an Indian raid.

The living-room was in darkness except for a faint gleam of flames from the stove. The windows were boarded up, so that when the Indians approached no signs of wakeful life might be seen in the house. Joe had opened and plugged the loopholes in the walls, which he himself had made by way of precaution when danger had threatened in the old days. On a shelf under each loophole lay a loaded repeating rifle.

"You scared any?" Amelia inquired, watching Harvey in the dim light as he stood eating a chunk of bread and bacon.

"Scared? Not I!" Harvey answered. "I'm just a bit tired waiting."

He crossed to one of the loopholes, withdrew the plug, and looked out.

"This loophole commands the horse corral," he said, glancing round at Joe Gildersley, who had just entered the room with his empty cup. "A good marksman would be as useful here as outside."

"Sure," Joe nodded. "You're a pretty good shot yourself, Harve, and my eyes ain't just what they used ter be. Guess you may as well occupy that post. What?"

"I might hit one of our own men," said Harvey. "There's not much good any of them being outside. They'd better by far be all in here, defending the homestead."

He drank his coffee, took up his gun, and, buttoning his thick winter coat, strode to the door.

"Where you goin'?" cried Amelia Gildersley.

"I'm going down to fetch in the men," Harvey told her.

"Hustle along then, quick," Joe called as the boy ran out.

The snowy peaks of the mountains were flushed with the rosy light of the rising sun when Harvey crossed the garden plot. He closed the stockade gate on its latch, and went cautiously round to the outhouse in the rear of the homestead, making no sound with his winter moccasins as he trod the hardened snow of the footpath.

At the back of the wood-stack he found Pierre Adieu and Barney O'Neill doing sentry-go, with their guns over their shoulders. Presently George joined them.

"Round up the boys and get them all indoors, right now," Harvey ordered the foreman. "I'm going across to the corral to bring in the other four. Pierre, you will wait inside the stockade gate, and don't open it unless you hear three knocks."

"*Eh, bien,*" said the half-breed. "You come back queek, I 'ope. Ze Hindian ees not ver' far away, sure. Ze sled dogs mek beeg growl; ze 'orses in stable zey get restless. You mek haste, then."

Harvey took cover among the trees, and ran towards the corral. He could see the ponies bunched in a crowd for warmth under the lee

of the high palisade, but there was no sign of the ranchmen. He could only count upon finding them by tracking their footprints in the snow.

When he left the ambush of the pine trees, there was a wide stretch of undulating fallow-land to cross, with nothing but the snowdrifts and an occasional bush to conceal him. All was silent; but the silence gave him no assurance that he was not crossing within sight of many watchful Indian eyes.

He found the trail of the four men. They had gone to the corral in single file, and there was no return track.

Halfway on his journey, he came to an abrupt stop at sight of hoofmarks crossing the trail, crushing out the men's footprints. The horse had not been shod, and he concluded from this circumstance that it had been ridden by an Indian.

Going down on his knees and elbows, he gazed searchingly in the direction in which the rider had gone. At first he could discover nothing unusual; but after a while his quick eyes detected a slight movement in a clump of young birches. A rabbit

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ran out, evidently startled by the same movement.

Harvey fixed his gaze steadily upon the birches. Again something moved. It was a horse, as white as the surrounding snow, but with a long, dark tail, and it was the restless swishing of the tail that had caught his attention.

Across the animal's bare back a man's arm rested, the hand gripping a gun. No more of him could be seen but a part of his blanket on the off-side under the horse's belly; but Harvey had no doubt that he was an Indian, and he surmised that he was the same scout whom he had seen on the previous afternoon.

Remembering Joe Gildersley's instructions that the first to see an Indian was to sound the alarm, Harvey brought his rifle into position and waited until the Redskin should give him a better mark to aim at.

Then he thought of his own exposed position, and of the danger of drawing the scout's attention in his direction. If he did not shoot, there might be time for him to run on to the corral and send Tulloch and Mitchell and their two companions back to the ranch-house.

He estimated the distance and his chances of covering it unseen by the scout or by other Indians who might be lurking in ambush. He decided to take the risk, and, accordingly, he rose to his feet and, bending to make himself less conspicuous, ran off, fearing that at any moment a bullet might stop him.

Will Tulloch leapt up to challenge him from the corral gate.

"All right!" cried Harvey. "Where are the others? Get back to the ranch-house, quick! Knock three times on the gate, and Pierre'll let you in."

"Charlie's here," Tulloch explained. "Mitchell's at the far side, somewheres, scouting around. Alf's gone back for more help. We'd need a dozen to save the horses against the crowd that's sneakin' along."

"Quit!" urged Harvey. "We're going to defend the corral from the house, see? Go back by way of the orchard. There's one of their scouts musing around the way I came. Quit! I'll slip along and fetch Mitchell."

The two men stole off and got to the house safely. Harvey made the circuit of the corral,

but could discover no sign of Mitchell. But Mitchell, he knew, was an experienced frontier fighter who could be trusted to look after himself as well as to do the best thing possible in defence of the ranch, and there was no time to go in further search of him.

Returning in his own tracks to the point from which Tulloch and Charlie had left him, Harvey waited for some minutes, watching and listening.

The sun had risen above the hills, shedding a dazzling glare over the snow. He could see the birch bushes where the Indian with his white horse had stood; but neither the Indian nor the horse was now visible.

There came to him faint sounds as of the chirping of birds from many directions. He tried to locate them, to determine exactly whence any of them came. They seemed to be coming nearer and nearer, and then to be assembling in a flock between the horse corral and the creek. And yet he could see no birds flying, could not be sure that they were really the voices of birds that he heard, and not the signal calls of Indians in ambush.

While he watched and listened, a new sound

fell upon his ear. It was as though a horse's foot had kicked against a loose stone, and it came from far behind him.

He turned sharply, and saw once again the same white horse; this time with an Indian astride. He raised his gun to shoot; but before the weapon was at his shoulder the horseman had disappeared beyond an abrupt rise in the ground.

Harvey felt certain that he had been seen. Had the scout gone round to get farther to the rear of him, and so cut off his retreat? He crouched low, waiting for the Indian's reappearance.

There was a movement along the ridge of the rise. Harvey kept his eyes fixed upon it, and presently a horse flung up its head; not a white horse, but a brown one. Then, some yards away from it, the shining barrel of a rifle swayed over, with the top of a black fur cap behind it. Clearly, there was a detachment of the enemy in ambush beyond that rise!

Suddenly, from the far side of the horse corral, there came a long, low whistle. It had hardly ceased when the crack of a gun-shot

sounded from the neighbourhood of the homestead.

Harvey looked round and saw a puff of powder smoke drifting from the corner loop-hole which he himself had been told to occupy.

CHAPTER XII

THE MYSTERIOUS MARKSMAN

THE fight had begun. Rifles were being fired in quick succession from the house, and from behind the loopholes in the stockade. Harvey was wanted. Joe Gildersley would already be fretting at his absence, anxious for his safety.

He took up his gun and ran. Even as he started a shot was fired from behind the hillock, aimed at himself, he believed, although he was not hit, and could not know where the bullet struck.

There was a second shot, and still he ran on untouched, taking an irregular zigzag course until he reached the cover of the trees, when he paused to take breath, and make sure that his farther way was clear.

His Winchester would be of less use than his revolver at close quarters should any of the enemy bar his way to the gate, as he feared they might, for there was an alarming racket

of shooting going on near the house. He drew the smaller weapon, carrying the rifle under his left arm, and went on cautiously.

He came out from the wood at the rear of the stables and bunkhouse, and again he paused before entering the wide clearing that encircled the home stockade. The stable and outhouses were in front of him. He strode forward, and peered round the corner, but drew back, startled by a wild Indian yell of defiance. What he had seen was even more alarming, and it was well that he had had the precaution of looking out before rushing for the gate.

A band of about a score of Redskins and half-breeds was in the clearing, making for the stables, and as they ran, yelling and waving their clubs and tomahawks, the rifles of the defenders were fired upon them. Some fell, but most of them passed unhurt, and crowded about the stable-door, battering at it with their axes and guns.

One of the Indians, dropping his gun and letting his tomahawk swing by its lanyard from his wrist, seized the waterpipe with both hands and climbed to the roof to make entrance by the skylight.

Harvey raised his revolver, pulled the trigger, and the Indian flung up his arms, lost his balance, and fell with a thud into the midst of the warriors battering at the door.

This was Harvey's chance. To reach the gate he had to make his way between the Indians and the palisade, and he might now run through the open lane while the Redskins' backs were turned.

One great risk threatened him. His friends were still firing upon the crowd at the stable-door, and he would have to cross the line of fire. Fortunately, however, he knew where the loopholes were pierced, and as he came to each of them in turn he could duck beneath the protruding gun-muzzle, and so escape injury.

This was what he did; and as he ran, keeping close to the upright timbers, he fired three of his remaining bullets into the mass of yelling savages, reserving the other two in case he should have further need of them.

"Joe! George!" he shouted, as he ran. And, farther on, he cried: "Pierre, let me in!" following it up by hammering three times on the gate.

Pierre Adieu was still at his post. He drew the bolt, and threw open the door.

"Ah, *mon cher* 'Arvey!" Pierre cried. "You are safe, then? *Parbleu!* we commence to suppose you was keel. *Vite—vite!* Come in, so I shut ze door once again!"

"Half a tick," demurred Harvey.

He pouched his revolver and raised his Winchester to his shoulder, firing three well-aimed shots at the Indians.

"Are the boys all in?" he panted, as the gate was banged to and barred and bolted.

"But yes," Pierre answered, "all hexcept Mitchell. You 'ave leave 'im in ze 'orse corral. Oh, well, 'e mek ver' good beesness."

Harvey ran across to the verandah, and bounded up the steps. The living-room was darkened by a mist of powder smoke, but through the reek he saw Mrs. Gildersley and Martha busily loading up the guns, placing them ready to the hands of the men at the loopholes, and taking the empty ones away.

Joe Gildersley was at the corner, bare-headed, bare-armed, with his pipe in his mouth, and his crinkled-up eyes squinting along the

sights of his gun as he leant his left elbow on the shelf in front of him.

Harvey watched him as he pulled the trigger, opened and shut the breech, and again took deliberate aim.

The pile of spent cartridges beside him gave mute evidence of his grim determination to save his horses, and his yet more precious home.

For a moment or two there was silence, excepting for the yelling and hammering of the Indians at the stable. Joe stood up and stepped back.

"Can't think what's gotten wrong wi' my eyes," he said, drawing a deep breath. "Guns are all right; must be my eyes. I've missed six of them last ten shots. Hullo, Harve! Where've you bin trampoosin, then? I notioned it was you firin' from back of the hillock over thar."

"I expect that's Dave Mitchell," said Harvey. "Unless it's one of the Redskins."

Joe shook his head very decisively.

"'Tain't Dave," he said. "Dave's inside the corral blockhouse, keepin' it up same's a machine. Who's back of the hill, then? 'Tain't

Redskins, sure. And thar's more'n one gun. Say, I can't make it out, nohow. I was plumb sartin it couldn't be no one but you—aimin' so steady, an' pickin' one off every time. Gee! Here, lay hold of this yer shooter and git busy!"

Harvey took the loaded rifle that was passed to him and slipped into Gildersley's place.

"Queer about that mysterious marksman," ruminated Amelia, watching the boy's easy management of the gun. "Can't think who he can be, fightin' on our side as if he was one of us. Where you been, Harve? Was that your pistol we heard goin' off back of the stable—four shots?"

"Maybe," Harvey answered. "I had to get through somehow. One of them had climbed the roof, and I didn't see why we should let him get in through the skylight and stampede our best horses. They won't break down that door in a hurry, though, and the dogs'll keep them back for a bit."

"Joe's gone up to your room to fire on them," said Amelia.

"Good," nodded Harvey, looking outward along the barrel of his gun. "Say, there's a

rare crowd bustling around the corral. Some of them are climbing over."

"That's what they've been doin' all the time," Amelia told him.

"My!" cried Harvey. "Two of them have been dropped! And there goes another, reeling round like a top! He's down, too, now."

For a few moments he watched. From his loophole he could see well into the compound, and all that was going on within the high palisades. The ponies were running about in terror at the persistent shooting. One of them lay dead, and an Indian, wearing a warrior's feathered headdress, had taken cover behind the carcase, and was firing alternately at the blockhouse within the gate and the hillock outside.

Harvey took very careful aim at him, pulled the trigger, and waited to see the effect of his shot.

The warrior's headdress quivered, and he lifted his hand to fix it straight; then proceeded to re-load his rifle.

Harvey again took aim and fired.

The Indian's gun fell, and the Indian himself plunged forward across the horse's side,

with his moccasined feet kicking the empty air.

The blockhouse door was opened, and a man ran out. It was Dave Mitchell. He ran up to the Indian, not to help him, for he was already beyond all help, but to take possession of his cartridges.

Harvey lowered his gun and watched. He saw Mitchell stooping over the dead warrior, snatching up his bag of cartridges and tugging desperately at the strap that held it. At the same moment a breach was made in the stout timbers at the far side of the corral, and a crowd of Indians rushed through the gap, yelling aloud their thrilling war-cries as they spread themselves out to round up the ponies and drive them outward to be seized by those who remained near the breach with ropes ready to lasso them.

One had entered on horseback. By his magnificent war-bonnet of white eagle plumes, Harvey knew him to be a chief, and he surmised that he was none other than the mischievous rebel Poundmaker. The chief shouted his commands to his warriors and braves, then he raised his gun to his shoulder, aiming at

Dave Mitchell, who was now running back at top-speed towards the blockhouse.

Harvey saw the puff of smoke, and heard the faint "ping" of the chief's rifle. Dave Mitchell staggered and fell, struggled to his knees, and again fell.

"Dave's shot! Dave's shot!" cried Harvey. "And there's no one near to help him!"

He gripped his rifle to fire a shot at the chief. But Poundmaker had already wheeled round and galloped out of the corral. Two or three of his braves followed him, each leading a captive pony.

Of what happened next Harvey Denham had always a confused and incomplete recollection. Dave Mitchell lay wounded and helpless, writhing and trying in vain to escape from the Indians, who now thronged the enclosure.

Glancing for an instant to the hillock, hoping that the mysterious marksman would protect the injured man by his well-aimed bullets, Harvey saw two horses crossing the ridge and dashing down the snowy slope. One was a white broncho, with an Indian on its back hurriedly covering himself with his blanket. The other was a chestnut, partly hidden behind

the white broncho. Its rider was bending over in his saddle.

Harvey could see no more of him than his black fur cap, and the black coat flung loosely over his shoulders. They quickly disappeared behind the palisade, above which the tops of their heads bobbed up and down as they galloped swiftly round towards the breach.

It seemed that the Indians had seen the two horsemen, and that they had taken alarm, for they ceased their chasing of the ponies, and ran about yelling wildly, gripping their clubs and tomahawks or handling their guns.

Some flung themselves down on their knees, pointing their rifles towards the breach, ready to fire. Others made for the blockhouse, and the main gate beside it, hoping to escape. As they approached, three shots in quick succession were fired out from the blockhouse, and three of the advancing Indians fell.

Harvey Denham was amazed. He had believed that Mitchell was the only occupant of the blockhouse. He wondered who was within. He saw the door flung open, and, suddenly, in the opening, the sunlight flashed upon the red tunic of a trooper of the Mounted Police.

Harvey was too far off to distinguish his features, and he did not recognise him as Roger Wingrove. He only knew that the trooper had dropped his gun and seized his revolver, and had run out to face the menacing swarm of Indians and rescue Dave Mitchell from their gleaming scalping-knives.

A movement at the far side of the enclosure drew his glance to the breach, from which the Indians, who had been making for it, were scattering like alarmed rats.

The two horsemen from the hillock rode in. Harvey knew the one on the white broncho now that his face was towards him, and his majestic figure plainly revealed.

"Why, it's Little Panther!" he exclaimed.

The second rider moved forward then, letting his loose fur coat drop back from his shoulders as he raised his revolver and swung it round threateningly. The falling coat disclosed his uniform of the Red Patrol.

Harvey peered eagerly outward from the loophole, trying to distinguish the stranger's features under his black bearskin busby. But there was no need for him to remain long in doubt. The man's seat on his saddle, his hand-

some, athletic figure, the easy poise of his head, his every movement was familiar.

Harvey drew back as a hand touched his elbow.

“Joe,” he cried excitedly. “Do you see who it is—your mysterious marksman? Do you see? Look! Look! It’s Sergeant Silk!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE INDIANS' ATTACK

JOE GILDERSLEY took Harvey's place as the boy drew back from the loophole, and peered out to the distant corral, where the red-coated soldier policeman, on his chestnut broncho, rode to and fro, stopping the Indians from stealing past him and escaping by the breach which they had made in the stout palisade.

"Yes," decided Joe, "that's sure Sergeant Silk; none other. Guess I'd know him anywheres. That's the figure of him. That's his fav'rite hoss, with the white pastern. That's his way of ridin', an' the way he puts fear of the law inter folks—kinder thoroughly. Say, he's roundin' up them Injuns same as if they was a herd of cattle! Who's the individual helpin' him, on the white pony? Kin you make him out, Harve?"

Harvey was looking out over Joe's shoulder.

"That's Little Panther," he said. "He's been scouting for Sergeant Silk. They were

together behind the hillock. Hullo!" he exclaimed, as a wild, triumphant yell and the sound of smashing timber reached him from the neighbourhood of the steadings, "what's going on outside? Come along! Let's go and see! Bring that other gun."

He turned, and saw Martha putting a pad of lint across an ugly tomahawk wound on the side of Barney O'Neill's face.

"Och, wirra, wirra," Barney wailed, "the spalpeen's kilt me entirely!"

Joe Gildersley followed Harvey out on to the verandah. At its end, where a barricade had been erected, there was a loophole commanding the stables.

Will Tulloch had been posted at this point, keeping up a steady, persistent fire upon the Redskins, who had again and again climbed from the wood-shed to the roof of the stable and bunkhouse. For a time he had successfully foiled their attempts to enter by the skylight; but one of their sharpshooters had discovered him, and returned his shots with equally good aim, and now Will had fallen with a bullet in his chest, moaning and breathing wheezily.

The abrupt ceasing of his concentrated fire gave the enemy their opportunity. At last they had broken in through the roof and were making an effort to force open the door from the inside.

Here Gildersley's vicious sled-dogs attacked the intruders furiously, and for some minutes there was a desperate, noisy fight, in which tomahawks and fangs were the weapons of assault.

Two of the dogs were killed outright, one had an ear cut off, and the others had slunk back among the straw, permitting the Indians to force the lock and open the door.

They were on the point of leading out the two best horses, Gold Eye and Daisy, when Joe and Harvey stooped to lift Tulloch from the corner where he lay.

"Hoist him on ter my back," Joe ordered, "and then lam inter those skunks that are sneakin' off with the hosses."

Harvey opened fire. But the savages, knowing where his shots were coming from, were cunning enough to take cover behind the stolen horses, and Harvey could not shoot at them

lest he should by chance send a bullet into Gold Eye or Daisy.

From another loophole, however, George and Pierre were at work, and when the Indians turned to drive the captive horses across the clearing to join their fellows at the corral, George fired three shots in quick succession, and the two animals scampered off with their halters trailing loose about their hoofs.

"*Parbleu!*" cried Pierre, "but zey will escape, dose two ponee, after all! Wait, then, I go out for catch 'em, bring 'em in 'ere. Why not?"

"Better stay where you are," advised George. "'Tain't safe outside these palin's."

"But what would you?" protested Pierre. "It ees necessaire we save ze ponee from ze Hindian. Zey tek dem all—every one."

He ran to the stockade gate. There Harvey Denham met him, going on the same errand, and they went out together, leaving one of the cowboys in charge of the gate. They saw the two horses trotting down the cart-track. Three Indians had got in advance of them to head them off. The horses turned and galloped towards the creek.

"Don't go too far, Pierre!" shouted Harvey.

He heard the dull throbbing of hoofs behind him, and, looking back over his shoulder, saw a small band of Indians following a stampede of the rest of the stock that they had driven out from the stables. The gate of the home stockade had been flung open, and several of the defenders were running out in pursuit, firing their revolvers as they ran.

Harvey Denham hesitated, doubtful what to do, blaming himself for having left the security of the homestead for the sake of two bronchos, which he could hardly hope to recover.

He realised that he had placed himself and Pierre in a very difficult situation. They were betwixt two sections of the enemy, and it seemed to him that whichever way he should choose to go he must be cut off from the possibility of a safe retreat.

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed Pierre. "Dis is bad beesness, what?"

A shrill war-whoop drew their alarmed glances towards the corrals. They saw the Indian chief rallying to his side the few warriors and braves who had followed him in his escape from the enclosure. These were all mounted

now, many of them on the ponies they had stolen, and they were riding downward with the obvious purpose of joining their companions from the stables in the capture of the stampeding horses.

"It ees no good—no good at all," deplored Pierre. "Dis tam we are sure done for, you and I, 'Arvey. *Hein?*"

"Unless Sergeant Silk comes along," nodded Harvey, fixing his anxious gaze upon the corral.

The high palings obstructed his view of the nearer side of the compound, but he could see a snowy strip of the higher ground beyond the centre, where the Indians and half-breeds had been rounded up in a submissive bunch, apart from the horses.

Sergeant Silk appeared already to have compelled them to give up their weapons, which lay in a confused pile in front of the blockhouse. Silk himself was at this moment riding alone towards the breach, leaving Little Panther and Roger Wingrove on guard.

"Unless Sergeant Silk comes along," Harvey repeated.

"But 'e is mile and mile away from 'ere," Pierre objected. "You will always expect ze impossible, *mon ami*."

"Here he comes!" cried Harvey. "Look!"

Sergeant Silk had galloped through the opening, and swung round on the track of Poundmaker and his warriors. Pierre saw him now.

"We are save!" he cried, inspired to a new confidence by the very sight of the red-coated policeman.

"Not yet," Harvey warned him. "Quick! be ready!"

The Indians were drawing nearer, spreading themselves out in a circle round the frightened horses, and at the same time enclosing Harvey and Pierre in the gradually tightening ring.

Half of their number were on foot; but those that were mounted dashed forward, and, with the skill of much practice, gave chase and captured many of the riderless ponies by means of their adroitly thrown lariats, holding them until a companion brave should run up to get astride. Halters were quickly contrived by cutting lengths from the trail ropes.

In many cases this manœuvre was frustrated by the rifle-fire of the men from the ranch, as well as by Pierre and Harvey, who used their guns from the ambush of a snowdrift. Nevertheless, all the horses from the stables were soon seized, including Daisy and Gold Eye.

The Redskins thereupon turned their attention to the defenders, some driving the ranchmen back towards the homestead; others circling round Harvey Denham and Pierre Adieu, and firing at them from under the outstretched necks of their steeds, keeping themselves in cover by lying along the offside.

It was while this was going on that Sergeant Silk rode up. He came to a halt at a well-chosen point beyond the outer rim of the circling Redskins. As they raced past him, giving him an easy mark, he began to fire at each in turn.

But he had fired only three or four shots when, the circle being broken, the Indians rode off in a wild stampede in the direction of the creek, yelling and whooping as they went.

Pierre and Harvey dropped their rifles, and, drawing their revolvers, ran forward, hoping to cut off the retreat.



HARVEY SAW THE UPRAISED ARM AND THE SHARP EDGE
OF THE TOMAHAWK.

A half-breed, mounted on Gold Eye, charged at Pierre, gripping his gun by its barrel to use it as a club as he rode him down.

Pierre raised his revolver, and pulled the trigger.

The half-breed swayed in his uncertain seat on the mare's bare back, and fell at Pierre's feet, with the halter, twisted round his wrist, dragging him along the snow.

The strain on her muzzle caused Gold Eye to stop abruptly.

Harvey Denham seized her.

"Mount, then; mount!" cried Pierre, running up to help him. "I give you leg up."

Two warriors, galloping by, saw the riderless mare, and wheeled sharply to secure her as their prize.

One of them, wearing a very fine war-bonnet, and a blanket of many colours, pressed up close to aim a blow at Harvey's head with his tomahawk.

Harvey saw the upraised arm, and the sharp edge of the weapon glinting in the sunlight. His own right hand held the mare's halter, and he had not time to draw his pistol and shoot. He was for the time helpless, and he made

certain that his last moment had come. The warrior flung himself bodily forward to give weight to the blow.

Harvey shrank back against the mare's warm side. But the expected blow did not come. Instead, the threatening tomahawk dropped from fingers shattered by a bullet from Sergeant Silk's revolver. The warrior toppled, and plunged over his pony's neck to the ground.

Sergeant Silk urged his charger nearer.

"Keep your eye on the chap at the far side," he commanded; and slipping his smoking gun into its holster, he bent down and caught at the halter of the fallen warrior's pony.

"Say, Pierre," he called out, "here's a mount that will do for you. Get astride right now, both of you, and come along with me."

Pierre had gone back to the half-breed, to disentangle Gold Eye's trail-rope from his wrist.

"Bagosh!" he exclaimed agitatedly on his return. "It ees extraordinaire, no mistek. Picture to yourself ze surprise which I 'ave to find ze man I 'ave jus' now shoot ees Emile Adieu—Emile Adieu, my own *oncle* of Quebec.

I am amaze. I do not compre'end. One tam, not ver' long since, 'e work right 'ere on zis ranch of Gildersley. *Alors*, now 'e fight with ze henemy for steal ze 'orses which 'e 'ave 'imself feed. And I, 'is nephew—I shoot 'im! It ees *tragique*. What?"

"He'd have clubbed your head if you hadn't fired," Harvey assured him.

"Ver' true," Pierre acknowledged. "Nevertheless, it was my *oncle* I shoot."

Sergeant Silk paused in helping Harvey Denham to climb to the mare's back.

"Worked on Gildersley's Ranch, eh?" he interrogated. "That explains. I guessed that there was one or more of the gang who knew the lie of the land. Well, you've put him out of action, Pierre, and that's satisfactory. Look slippy, both of you. We must push back to the corral to save the rest of the ponies, and see to Dave Mitchell." He gave Harvey a hoist up to his seat astride of the waiting broncho. "How have they got along at the homestead?" he inquired. "That stockade of Joe's held out all right, I hope. Any casualties?"

"Two of our men are rather badly hurt,"

Harvey explained. "Mrs. Gildersley and Martha are looking after them."

"That is well, so far," Silk nodded. "I could see Joe was managing without help. He's not new at this game. But he'd better have had a couple of rifles inside the stables. How did the Indians get in? Through the roof, I suppose? Bear to your right. They'll rally down at the creek, and return to the attack."

He went in advance, dropping his bridle rein over the horn of his saddle, and loading up his firearms as he rode. Harvey and Pierre followed his example. They were both well supplied with cartridges, and if Sergeant Silk thought a safeguard necessary, then they, too, should be prepared against a renewal of the hostilities.

CHAPTER XIV

SERGEANT SILK TO THE RESCUE

WITHIN the horse corral the braves and half-breeds had heard their chief's rally cry from afar. They were fretting desperately to join him; but they were helplessly cut off. They had been deprived of their weapons, and could not fight their way past the two watchful horsemen who were their warders, ever alert to frustrate an attempt at escape.

The ranch ponies which they coveted had been removed beyond their reach in the branding pens, and each knew that should he break away from his companions, and make a dash for liberty, he would only be a mark for bullets that were quick and certain.

One of their number had dared to crawl stealthily away in the direction of the blockhouse gate, unseen by Little Panther or the young red-coated trooper, who were on guard; but an unexpected shot from the blockhouse

doorway had stopped him where he now lay staining the whiteness of the snow.

Another had attempted to climb the palisade, but just as he was in the act of pulling himself upward to throw a leg over, something struck his exposed forearm.

He dropped back and turned to see Little Panther calmly lowering his smoking gun.

A third had crept inch by inch round the shadowed side of the enclosure towards the breach in the palings, and was about to make a run for the finish when the young trooper suddenly appeared in front of him, to drive him back like a sheep to the fold.

Roger Wingrove was having an anxious and hard-worked time at his post in the corral. It was his first real experience of active police service; his baptism of fire.

For weeks he had led the routine life of a recruit at regimental headquarters, proud to have been enlisted, proud in wearing the Imperial scarlet, and being regarded with respect when he strode with clanking spurs through the town, or rode his charger on parade.

The drills, "stables," "fatigues," "rides,"

and "guards" had been alike splendid new games in which he had tried his utmost to excel.

And then, while he still supposed that he was counted as a mere recruit, he was drafted into the Saskatchewan Patrol to learn the value of discipline under Sergeant Silk.

Silk had already discovered that the rebel Indians were out on the warpath, engaged in horse raids on the remote ranches; and on the same day that Wingrove joined his patrol Little Panther arrived with the news that Pound-maker, with a large village, had made camp in Dead Man's Gap, within a few miles of Gildersley's.

Accompanied by his Indian scout and the raw trooper, Silk had gone off on the trail to warn Joe Gildersley, arriving at dawn to discover the Redskins and their half-breed allies stealing up to the horse corral.

Roger Wingrove had not anticipated being called upon to fire a shot, and even when the sergeant stationed him with Dave Mitchell in the blockhouse he did not realise that there was to be serious fighting.

But he had been only a few minutes at his

post when shots outside assured him that operations had begun in earnest.

A nervous agitation seized him as he saw the first of the Indians crossing the snow within the enclosure.

Mitchell fired at one who was climbing in over the palisade. Shots came from the rear and from the distant homestead. Then Roger himself got beside Mitchell at the window and opened fire.

Bullets from the Indians' guns began to patter against the timbers of the blockhouse. Wingrove wondered why he was not more afraid of them. He knew that at any moment one might hit him, but he was not conscious of fear; his hand was steady, his aim true, and he kept at his work.

Mitchell's stock of cartridges was soon exhausted, and he ran out to secure more from the Indian, whose rifle-fire from behind the barrier of the dead horse he had just stopped with his last shot.

Roger watched him as he ran; watched him seize the dead warrior's cartridge-bag and start back with it.

When Dave fell, struck by a bullet from the chief's Winchester, Wingrove gave a gasp of consternation. He dropped his gun and went to the door. There he stood, looking out eagerly.

What was he to do?

He saw Dave struggle to rise to his feet, then fall. It was his leg that was wounded. He could not save himself, and the enclosure was thronged with the savages. One of them was advancing towards the helpless man with his scalping-knife drawn.

Wingrove took out his revolver, but his hand was trembling. Was it from fear, from cowardice?

He might well have felt the need for courage to face that throng of brutal savages; but even though believing himself to be at heart a coward, something within him told him that he could not leave Dave Mitchell lying wounded and helpless there on the snow. If he did so, what would Sergeant Silk think of him?

"I'll do it!" he said to himself, while he trembled in every limb. "I'll do it!"

Gripping his revolver, with his finger on the trigger, he bent forward, and ran out, very quickly, planning as he ran how he would pick up the wounded man and fling him bodily over his shoulder.

He remembered afterwards having fired a shot at a brave who attempted to stop him; remembered how, in his agitation, he had bungled over thrusting his weapon into its holster. But all he thought of in the exciting moments was Dave Mitchell.

"Quick!" he cried. "Sling your arm round my neck! Lift yourself while I grab hold of you!"

He did not know that he was so strong; but Mitchell was not a very big man, and the burden was not great.

A bullet whistled past his ear as he staggered back, panting. Dave's hand, which still held the bag of cartridges, was pressed against his windpipe, and his own left hand was numb with cold, its grip slackening. But he reached the blockhouse in safety, and lowered his burden to the floor.

The bullet had entered the back of Dave's

right leg above the knee. Very swiftly and dexterously, Wingrove cut away the leather legging and trouser, and, baring the torn limb, tied a scarf round it, using the cleaning-rod of his carbine as a tourniquet.

"Say, there's Sergeant Silk and Little Panther just come into the corral," Dave told him. "You'd best mount your plug and go out to 'em, hadn't you? I shall be all right now if you leave my gun beside me, case I need it."

Wingrove's charger had been hobbled behind the blockhouse. He leapt to the saddle, and rode across to the sergeant's side.

"Where's Mitchell?" Silk asked sharply.

"I've left him in the hut, there," Wingrove answered. "His leg's hurt—shot. I've tied it up."

"Right," said Silk. "You and Little Panther will keep guard here. Take possession of their weapons. If any of them attempt to escape, shoot."

And now Roger Wingrove, fulfilling his instructions, was still on guard, and the Indians were exercising all their cunning and ingenuity

to escape. Their attention was fixed upon a stretch of level ground down by the creek, where Poundmaker was rallying his forces.

"They will come here," said Little Panther. "They will come to rescue their brothers, and carry away their wounded. They will take the horses. For us it will be bad medicine if Sergeant brings no help."

Roger Wingrove saw that the greatest danger was in the possibility of his prisoners regaining possession of their weapons. He had taken the precaution of removing the firearms into the blockhouse; but there still lay a pile of tomahawks, knives, and clubs.

He rode up to the pile now, and, dismounting, took his blanket and spread it out, tossing the weapons into it, and tying them up in a bundle, which he lashed to the end of his trail-rope and dragged away, leaving it in charge of Dave Mitchell.

The temporary withdrawal of his watchfulness caused his prisoners to become restless. They moved in a body, as if to make a combined dash.

But Little Panther was quick to check them. He rode his broncho up to them, driving them

into a compact bunch, keeping them under control until Wingrove galloped back.

"Good," said Little Panther, approvingly. "The lynx that has no claws cannot scratch."

Down at the side of the creek, the chief and his warriors had ranged themselves in order of battle, and were advancing slowly up the snowy slope.

Roger Wingrove, seeing them, and realising their intention of storming the corral, edged nearer to Little Panther.

"We shall be cornered here," he said. "We can't hold out against a lot like that."

"Wait," returned Little Panther calmly. "Sergeant is not asleep. He has left us. But he will be here very soon. Little Panther knows him. Wait."

The padding of horses' hoofs on the snow came nearer as the Redskins broke into a gallop, yelling their war-cry.

Roger Wingrove gripped his carbine, and glanced with fear in their direction. The Indians behind him began to yell and make threatening movements to get past.

Wingrove turned and raised his gun, sweeping it round in warning. Then again he

glanced at the advancing enemy. They were hardly a hundred yards away, and galloping furiously towards the breach in the stockade.

Suddenly he saw their leaders swerve and throw back their steeds to their haunches.

At the same instant three shots were fired from beside the breach, and he saw the red sleeve of Sergeant Silk's uplifted arm under the barrel of a rifle. Then Sergeant Silk himself rode across the opening, followed by Harvey Denham and Pierre Adieu.

All three of them came to a halt side by side in front of the gap.

"Again!" commanded Silk, and three further shots were fired.

Poundmaker lashed at his horse with his quirt as he turned away, and with his warriors and braves after him, rode off beyond range.

"That's all right," said the sergeant, leading the way into the corral. "They won't give us any more trouble this time, I fancy. Now I will go and have a look at Mitchell. I hear he has a shot wound. You two can give Wingrove and Little Panther a hand dealing with these chaps in here."

“What are you going to do with them?” Harvey Denham inquired. “Going to take them prisoners?”

“Why, cert’nly,” replied Silk, “when we have patched up their wounds.”

CHAPTER XV

SCOUTING AROUND

SERGEANT SILK dismounted in front of the blockhouse, dropped his bridle rein over the tie post, and strode inside the little hut, looking searchingly through the mist of lingering powder smoke.

"Seems you've got hit, then?" he said, discovering Dave Mitchell lying along the floor, covered with blankets, looking alarmingly white about the face.

"Seems so, Sergeant," Dave responded, making light of his wound. "There's a bullet got mixin' itself up with the anatomy of my leg. Guess I shall limp some, for a while. Good job it's winter-time and not much work doin'. Say, you got rid of them Indians outside the corral?"

"They've gone back across the creek," said Silk, "having lost a man for every horse they've stolen. But they're liable to come back. It's

likely they'll give Gildersley's another call before they quit the neighbourhood." He stood looking down at Dave. "Queer your being hit in the leg when you were in here firing from behind a barricade," he went on. "You must sure have exposed yourself at the open door. That was not wise."

"I was outside, there," Dave explained, with a nod towards the middle of the corral. "We'd got short of ammunition, and I just slipped out to sneak some cartridges that one of the Redskins had no more use for, see? The skunks tried to stop me. They'd sure have had my scalp, only your pardner pulled me in."

Silk did not ask for particulars of Roger Wingrove's performance. He took it as a matter of course.

"What's all this truck?" he inquired, planting a foot on the bundle of weapons that Wingrove had thrown in.

"Just Indian popguns and scalpin'-knives," Mitchell explained. "A few tomahawks, too, most likely. Your pardner fetched 'em in, so as they'd be out of the Redskins' reach, case they notioned to lay hold of 'em."

"Right," Silk nodded. "That was a

necessary precaution. Let me have a look at your wounded leg and see if I can plug up the hole. You seem to have shed a considerable amount of blood, judging by the mess you've made about the floor. What?"

He knelt and drew aside the blanket, disclosing the injured limb.

"H'm!" he muttered, fingering the tightly drawn bandage. "That's a decent enough piece of surgical work. You didn't tie it yourself, Dave."

"No. Your pardner fixed it, kinder temporary. That's his cleanin'-rod he used for a turnscREW. You might loosen it some. My foot's gettin' kind of numb."

"Better leave it just as it is," Silk advised. "We can get out the bullet when you're back at the bunkhouse." He tucked the blanket about the limb to keep out the cold. "You'll be all right in here for a bit," he added, standing up and going to the door. "I shall be back inside of five minutes."

He remounted his broncho and cantered across to the far side of the compound. There he was met by the foreman and a party of cowboys from the ranch. George was astride

of Daisy's bare back. Alf and Charlie were also mounted on ponies, which they had succeeded in recapturing from the enemy.

"Say, George," said the sergeant, "we shall have to house and feed these prisoners, somehow. Where can we put them up?"

"Thar's heaps of room in the stable, and the long barn's empty," declared the foreman, glancing round the corral and observing the several grim, dark patches on the snow. "You'll want a sled or two to carry them that are hurt. We kin let the others lie where they are—coverin' them."

"That is my idea," signified Sergeant Silk. "And we may as well move the ponies. They are only a temptation to Poundmaker and his gang. If Joe Gildersley has no objection, I can use them for carrying the prisoners to barracks."

"Right!" agreed George. "Meanin' as you'll borrow them for a while?"

"Exactly! In the meantime we will corral them in a corner of the home stockade, where they might have been at first. It's never wise to distribute your goods when there are Indians about. They'll do some damage to

Mrs. Gildersley's cabbage patch, I dare say, but that doesn't signify."

On his way back to the blockhouse he gave instructions to Roger Wingrove concerning the removal of the horses and prisoners. Then, with Harvey Denham's help, he got Dave Mitchell on his broncho in front of him and rode out of the corral to the homestead.

For the remainder of that day Sergeant Silk was busily occupied in attending to the wounded, seeing that the prisoners were safely housed within the long barn, and the ponies brought within the stockade. He posted Little Panther and Pierre Adieu on guard over the barn, but did not consider it necessary to protect the corral. The Indians who had been fatally wounded were covered with their own blankets and left lying side by side near the breach in the palisade.

Joe Gildersley's losses had not been very serious. Five of his men had been injured, ten of his prairie ponies had been stolen, one killed, and another lamed, and two of his sledge dogs were dead.

"It might easily have been a heap wuss, Sergeant," Joe said across the supper table.

"But, you see, we'd laid in a good stock of ammunition and guns. And, come to think of it, Injuns ain't what they used ter be for fightin', nor nothin' like it. They've got less cunnin', less pluck and dash than they had in the old war-trail days, when I fust come out West, no older'n Harve, here."

Harvey Denham offered Sergeant Silk the use of his bedroom for the night.

"You've had a hard day's work, Sergeant," he said, "and my bed's just as snug as any you ever slept in, with the stove-pipe coming through the floor near your feet."

"Thank you, Harve," Silk smiled; "but an armchair beside the stove itself is about my mark. Wingrove and I will pass the night here in the kitchen. If anything happens outside, we shall be handy."

Before settling himself for the night, he made a final round of the steadings to assure himself that all was well. The Indians and half-breeds were quiet and comfortable in the long barn, lying wrapped in their blankets and buffalo-ropes around a red-hot stove; but already the place was beginning to have the peculiar stuffy atmosphere of an airtight wigwam, and the

sergeant discovered that they had blocked up the ventilator.

"Wough!" one of the Stonies shivered, seeing him force it open. "Bad medicine! Too much cold. Want tabac, smoke pipe, make warm."

"Smoking isn't down in the programme," Silk told him. "You've had a good supper. You're better off now than you'd be in your teepee out there in Dead Man's Gap. Make sleep, and forget. That's your plan."

Their wounded companions in the stable were being nursed by the cowboys from the adjoining bunkroom. One of them had torn the bandages from an injured head; another had shifted the splint from a fractured limb, and a third was grumbling because a wound in his jaw interfered with his enjoyment of the pannikin of hot coffee with which the foreman had provided him. Sergeant Silk administered comfort and consolation, and gave them the impression that, instead of being prisoners, they were welcome guests.

"That's all right," he said on his return within doors.

He flung himself wearily into an easy

chair opposite the one occupied by Roger Wingrove.

"So you have had your first encounter with Red Indians, eh?" he said, taking out his briar pipe and beginning to load it with plug tobacco. "You were not afraid of being scalped, were you?"

Wingrove had risen to his feet at the sergeant's entrance; but now he again seated himself, leaning forward to get a light from the stove.

"Not of being scalped," he answered.

Silk took the light that was handed to him, but paused before applying it to his pipe, looking across into Wingrove's face, which was illumined by the glow from the fire.

"Then there was something else that you were afraid of," he said very quietly.

Wingrove closed the door of the stove with his outstretched foot.

"Well." He hesitated. "You see, it's the first time I've ever been under fire, and I must confess I was more than a little afraid when the bullets were flying about, and I saw what damage they were doing."

"Exactly." Sergeant Silk was puffing

thoughtfully at his pipe. "But you kept on shooting. I heard your gun at work, and you didn't always miss your aim."

"I'd had your orders to shoot," Wingrove faltered.

"And I should have been some vexed if you'd disobeyed," Silk assured him, adding, as he leant back in his chair: "You pulled Mitchell in when he went to get those cartridges, and was shot in the leg. Were you afraid, then?"

"Yes," Wingrove confessed. "I never was in such a blue funk in all my life. But I couldn't leave him lying there bleeding when the Indians were crowding around."

"Of course not," Silk agreed. "Any man would have done the same. It was only your duty."

"That's how I looked on it," said Wingrove—"an ordinary duty. That's all."

"You fixed up his leg very decently," Silk resumed. "He'd sure have bled to death if you hadn't made a tourniquet of your cleaning-rod."

"You think so?"

"Why, cert'nly. That artery meant business.

I had no end of a job tying it up afterwards. So you were not afraid of being scalped?"

"No. Indians have given up that game. I suppose the hobby of collecting the tops of men's heads has lost its glory and interest under civilisation."

"Sure," Silk nodded. "But there's no telling what an Indian will do, once he's on the war-trail. Some, like our friend Little Panther and his pretty squaw, White Plume, take to civilisation all right. But others—well, a good many of Poundmaker's lot had painted their faces. Their war-bonnets don't matter so much. They're worn like medals, each feather counting for some past achievement. But I shall not be surprised at their going back very soon to scalp-collecting."

"What do you mean by very soon?" Roger Wingrove inquired. "Do you seriously believe that they intend to break out in war against the settlers?"

Sergeant Silk pressed the tobacco tighter in the bowl of his pipe.

"They have done so already," he answered. "That is why they are so anxious to get hold of as many horses as they can steal. Of course,

it's the *Métis*, the French-Indian half-breeds, who are the real rebels; but they're getting the Redskins to stand in with them; not Poundmaker and his Stonies alone, but thousands of others, who are ready to join—Crees, Blackfeet, Salteaus, Chippewayans, Bloods, Piegans, Sarcees, Crows, and renegade Sioux. And how we of the Mounted Police are going to hold them in check is more than I can say. We're the forlorn hope of Western Canada. On us depend thousands of women and children marked out for butchery, death at the stake, and every nameless horror of Indian war. We're going to have a tough job of it, Wingrove, and I advise you to conquer your fear of whistling bullets, and to cultivate the quality of courage. Good-night. You need sleep."

At about midnight, Roger Wingrove awoke with a start, and looked in amaze round the dimly-lighted room. The chair facing him was empty, but, turning his gaze to a farther corner, he saw Sergeant Silk leaning across the ledge of an open loophole, peering outward over the moonlit snow.

"Is there anything wrong, Sergeant?" Win-

grove cried, throwing the blanket from his knees, and rising to his feet.

Silk moved aside, with his gun across his arm.

"Have a look, and see what you make of it," he said.

Roger Wingrove had excellent eyesight, but it was less practised than Silk's, and he looked searchingly for several moments before he detected the movements of dark, human figures on the white ground between him and the horse corral.

"The Indians—come back!" he exclaimed in alarm.

"Sure," agreed the sergeant. "Do you feel like going out and scouting around a bit to see what they're up to? I'd go myself, only it's just possible that the gang in the long barn may give trouble here. They certainly will if they hear any signal calls. Say, you're trembling! You can't be cold in this hot room!"

"I'm not cold," said Wingrove. "I—I suppose it's just excitement. Do you mean me to go out there by myself—alone?"

"Why, cert'nly—if you go at all. I'm not commanding you to do so. But I don't want

a whole crowd to do the job. Scouting work of this sort is always best when there's only one at it. I'll wake up Harvey Denham if you like."

"No. I will go," Wingrove determined, forcing himself to do the thing he did not want to do. "I hope you don't think I'm afraid?"

"When I think such a thing as that, I will tell you," returned Silk. "Take your gun, in case you need it. And cover your tunic with your overcoat. Just see what they're up to, and then come back and report."

Roger Wingrove drew his bearskin busby down about his ears, buttoned his buffalo coat over his chest, and went out, pulling on his fur mittens.

One of the cowboys on guard in the stockade opened the gate for him.

"Give three knocks when you come back, Moun'ty," the man said, "and I shall savvy who 'tis."

"Silly cuckoo I was to let Silk see I was agitated," Wingrove reflected as, having passed by the rear of the steadings, he made his way in among the shadows of the trees. "I'm not really afraid. At least, I don't think I am."

CHAPTER XVI

MISSING

WINGROVE stopped abruptly at sight of something black that lay in his path. He fancied at first that it moved, that it was a crouching Indian. But he poked at it with his gun, and discovered that it was a buffalo robe which some Indian had dropped.

He went on with cautiously quiet strides, until he came to the high ground beyond the trees. Here he paused, wondering if he should risk being seen by crossing the open stretch of moonlit snow between him and the corral.

He could see over the nearer railings of the enclosure from where he stood, and presently a horseman rode in by the gate near the block-house. Wingrove could tell by the way the man sat hunched up in his blanket that it was an Indian.

A second and a third rider entered. They crossed the enclosure in single file. Each horse

was dragging a pair of travois poles. He could hear the rasping of the poles along the frozen snow.

The Indians halted at the gap in the palisade, where they were joined by six others on foot. Then a cloud crossed over the moon, and all was in deep shadow. When again the moon shone, Roger saw clearly what was happening. The Indians were carrying away their dead.

He had no need to go any farther, and he turned on his back trail, walking quickly, but making no sound beyond the crunching of his moccasins in the snow.

When he came again to the spot where he had seen the buffalo robe he stopped, went back a few paces, then returned, searching curiously. The buffalo robe was no longer there, and his own track in the snow had been crushed by other feet. The footmarks pointed in the direction in which he himself was now going. He followed them, treading with caution, glancing from side to side and listening, listening; carrying his gun in the crook of his arm, with his bare forefinger on the trigger.

He could scarcely distinguish the footprints

that he was tracking, and more than once he bent to examine them closer. They went off the open path, and in among the stout pine trees. He stood still for many moments, and presently, as his eyes rested upon one particular tree, he saw the figure of an Indian glide stealthily from behind it, wearing the buffalo robe.

Wingrove strode forward in pursuit. The Indian glanced back at him, increased his silent pace, and disappeared into the darkness so effectually that Wingrove could neither see nor hear the slightest sign of him, nor make out in which direction he had gone.

In his perplexity he began to feel nervous, knowing with certainty that he was being watched by eyes much sharper than his own. He could feel his heart beating against his ribs. A clump of snow falling from a tree near him startled him; every bush and hollow seemed to conceal a lurking danger. Was he afraid? He did not know; but assuredly he was most uncomfortably apprehensive.

He lowered his gun, carrying it under his left arm, and went cautiously back to the path, determined to return as quickly as possible

to report what he had seen to Sergeant Silk.

He had barely gone half-a-dozen paces when, glancing over his shoulder, he saw the scout following behind him. He turned to run; but checked himself, and wheeled round. The Indian stopped, stood facing him in the moonlight, while a tomahawk flashed from among the black folds of his buffalo robe.

Roger Wingrove's right hand felt for his revolver; instantly the Indian sprang forward, swinging back his weapon to strike. In the same instant Wingrove leapt at him, and his fist shot out from the shoulder full into the Redskin's face, between the eyes.

With a howl of pain the scout reeled and fell. Wingrove bent over him, seized him by the shoulders, took possession of his tomahawk, and, forcing him to his feet, pushed him in front of him, and made him walk along the path to the bunkhouse.

Beyond the trees his prisoner tried to break away; but the cold ring of a revolver muzzle against his cheek stopped him.

The foreman flung open the door in response to a knock.

"Here's another prisoner for you to look after, George," Wingrove announced, driving the scout in across the threshold.

"Well?" said Sergeant Silk, as Roger Wingrove re-entered the kitchen, and took off his overcoat and busby. "What are they up to?"

"Carrying away their dead," Roger answered.

"So I guessed," Silk nodded. "They will save Joe Gildersley an unpleasant job. You didn't let them catch sight of you, did you?"

"One of their scouts got on my track," Wingrove answered. "But I collared him, and shoved him into the bunkhouse."

"Ah," said Silk. "That was right. I expect he was spying round to find out where his pals and the horses all are. It's as well you didn't allow him to get back with his report. There might have been an attempt at rescue. I see you brought his tomahawk in with you. Say, you've put your six-shooter the wrong way in its case. Why did you take it out? A pistol shot would have been heard. There might have been trouble."

"So I thought," returned Wingrove. "That's

why I used my fist instead. I hope it's not against the regulations to strike an Indian."

Sergeant Silk smiled.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it's a very serious offence," he said. "You had better forget about it, and finish your sleep. There's a cup of coffee by the stove. It will warm you."

Early the next morning, when Roger Wingrove awoke, it was to find Mrs. Gildersley and Martha busy getting breakfast ready.

"Looks like as we were goin' to have more snow," remarked Mrs. Gildersley. "But I guess that won't detain Sergeant Silk when there's anythin' in the shape of duty to take him away. He told me to send you out to him soon as you were through with your sleep."

Wingrove flung on his overcoat, and went out. In the clearing in front of the stables he discovered the sergeant helping his wounded prisoners into sledges, while George, Pierre Adieu, Harvey Denham, and Joe Gildersley were occupied in fitting halters to the prairie ponies. On each pony a blanketed Indian or half-breed was mounted, with his ankles tied one to the other under the girth. Four pack-

horses at the gate of the stockade were being loaded with provisions.

"Get our mounts saddled, Wingrove," Sergeant Silk ordered, "and then take charge here while I go in and get a bite of breakfast. We shall start as soon as you've had yours."

"Say, Sergeant, air you figurin' ter take the whole of this bunch along without any help?" questioned Joe Gildersley. "I notioned Harve an' Pierre was goin'. I kin loan you one or two more as well."

"Thank you, Joe," returned Silk. "But you're not out of the wood yet. If Poundmaker pays you a call, you will need all the hands you've got, and I have Little Panther, as well as Trooper Wingrove."

Snow was falling in big, steady flakes when the cavalcade was four miles out from Gildersley's. It continued, and Sergeant Silk pushed on with increased speed, hoping to reach Thirty Mile Bend before dusk, when he would telegraph to headquarters, reporting particulars of the raid and asking for help.

He rode at the head of the procession of his prisoners, but often went back along the files to assure himself that all was right.

Once, when he rode to the rear to order Little Panther and Roger Wingrove to hustle along the stragglers, Little Panther beckoned him aside.

"Little Panther is anxious," said the Indian. "The breeds are restless. They get together. They talk among themselves. Sometimes they stop, and try to leave signs along the trail—signs that will be understood by their friends behind."

"So?" said Silk. "And Little Panther thinks that we are being followed?"

"Um," nodded the Indian. "Poundmaker would still try to seize the horses, to set free his friends, who are your prisoners."

"If they leave any more signs," said Silk, "let them be picked up or destroyed."

At noon a halt was made, and, when the journey was resumed, Roger Wingrove rode to the front and back, counting the prisoners.

There had been twenty-five. Now there were only twenty-four, and one pony was riderless.

"It's the scout that I had the tussle with in the wood," he decided. "He has given us the slip!"

He went up to Little Panther.

"Tell Sergeant Silk that I have gone back to the place where we halted," he said. "I shall be back very soon. Tell him a prisoner has escaped."

He turned his horse, and rode away through the thickly falling snow. Little Panther called him back, but he took no heed. Little Panther waited for Sergeant Silk to drop to the rear. It was a longer time than usual before he did so, and when he was told that Trooper Wingrove had gone back, he frowned and bit his pipe with vexation.

"Well, all right," he said. "I expect he will soon overtake us."

The next time he returned to the rear, Roger Wingrove was still missing. Dusk gathered. The trail was deep with snow, and still he did not return.

CHAPTER XVII

GREEN-GRASS-GROWING-IN-THE-WATER

HARDLY had Roger Wingrove quitted the outfit when he realised that he was acting entirely without orders and giving his superior serious cause for vexation.

He knew that, instead of riding off impulsively on his own responsibility, he ought to have gone forward to the head of the marching column and reported to Sergeant Silk the fact that one of the prisoners had escaped, leaving it to the sergeant to determine what should be done.

It was true that he had told Little Panther to inform Sergeant Silk of his intention to go off in pursuit. Little Panther had called him back. But Little Panther had no authority either to order him to go or to prevent his going; and he had gone in spite of the Indian's caution, excusing himself on the plea that he

believed he would be back with the fugitive before Sergeant Silk could be aware of his absence.

"It will be bad medicine if the Indian keeps his freedom," said Little Panther. "Pound-maker will learn from him many things which he ought not to know."

"Bad medicine—yes," acknowledged Sergeant Silk. "But it will be worse medicine still if Trooper Wingrove does not come back. You tell me that it is the same Indian whom he met scouting in the wood at midnight. Are you sure that this is so?"

"Sure," averred Little Panther. "It is the same. His two eyes were black and swollen, by a blow from a trooper's closed hand. Men call him Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water. He is known on the prairie trails. He is a great scout. His medicine is powerful. He keeps many secrets. The snake in the reeds is not more cunning. He is as the shadow which makes no sound when it moves. He can hear the grass growing. He can see what his enemy is thinking. He is wise."

"Meaning, I suppose, that you wouldn't give a glass bead for Wingrove's chance of catch-

ing him? More likely the other way about, eh?"

"Um!" Little Panther screwed up his eyes and looked back over the trail through the thick curtain of snowflakes, as if he were reasoning that it would be a very clever scout indeed who should be able to find his way about in such a storm. "Bad!" he ejaculated. "Heap bad!"

Roger Wingrove was well aware that the heavily falling snow would quickly wipe out the tracks of the ponies, and that even the deep grooves ploughed by the runners of the sledges would soon be hidden, making it imperative that he should return with all possible speed.

The snow would even more quickly cover the light footprints of the escaping Indian. But he had started in pursuit, and he knew that it was a point of honour among the Mounted Police that when once a trooper has set out in quest of a fugitive he was not expected to return without his man.

There was every reason why he should make haste, and accordingly he urged his broncho to a canter, which was continued until he

came into the coulée where Sergeant Silk had called a halt.

It was here, he believed, that Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water had managed to slip free from the rope that fettered him and steal off unseen into the cover of the surrounding brushwood. He remembered having seen the scout leaning over from his seat on horseback, speaking with a warrior on a piebald pony near him, possibly asking his help in shielding his escape.

Wingrove had observed then that the bridge of the scout's nose was swollen, and that his eyes were inflamed. He was rather gratified by this evidence of the effect of his blow from the shoulder. Green Grass had not appeared to notice him.

Arriving in the coulée, Wingrove rode to the spot where the snow had been trodden and sullied by the hoofs of the restless ponies and the moccasins of the few prisoners who had been allowed to dismount. He saw the prints of himself and Sergeant Silk, distinguished from the rest by the marks of spurs at the heels.

He rode round in a wide circle until he

came to a clump of saskatoon bushes, and here he discovered a track in the snow which at first perplexed him by its confused impressions. He looked down upon it, studying it carefully.

Here and there he distinguished the blurred marks of human hands, which were crushed by heavier marks, which he took to be of a man's knees, and these again were blurred by further dragging tracks as of some garment that had been drawn along as a brush to wipe out the previous impressions.

Roger was beginning to be skilled in scoutcraft, and he was not long in reading these indistinct signs through the layer of snow that already powdered them.

They told him that the person who had made them had been crawling along to the cover of the saskatoons, wiping out the marks of his hands and knees by the dragging of his feet and his buffalo robe behind him.

He followed them behind the bushes to where the fugitive had crouched in hiding, kneeling on the buffalo skin, and waiting until the way should be clear for him to escape.

Beyond this shelter he had been less cautious. He had risen to his feet and had neglected to

wipe out his tracks. They were recent, for the snow had not yet filled the impressions of his moccasins.

Roger dismounted and examined them more closely, estimating their size, observing their shape, and comparing them mentally with the tracks which he had seen on the moonlit snow in the wood at Gildersley's.

They were the same; and looking forward at them he noticed, as he had noticed in the wood, that the left foot pointed outward at an unusual angle, with the weight thrown upon the great toe. By the distance between the footmarks and the depth of the fore part of the foot, he judged that Green Grass had been running.

He remounted and followed in pursuit, keeping the track always in view, whilst paying close regard to the positions of the landmarks—here a bluff of poplars, there an isolated pine tree, or a thickly wooded valley, backed by hills, whose shapes he carefully noted through the mist of falling flakes; each rock and cliff, each desolate stretch of bare, unbroken snow he observed.

And often he glanced back, so that on his

return journey he might know again the lie of the land and be sure of his way.

The footprints still indicated that the escaping scout was running. Clearly, Green Grass was making haste, with the apparent intention of rejoining Poundmaker and his warriors and leading them on to an attack upon Sergeant Silk's ill-defended train of prisoners and ponies.

Roger Wingrove began to persuade himself now that, by intercepting Green Grass, he would be saving Sergeant Silk from disaster.

After a while the footprints were mingled with the tracks of the hoofs and sledges on Silk's trail; but, as they were leading in the opposite direction and were more recent, they could easily be distinguished.

As Wingrove went on, they were more and more fresh, less covered with new snow. He was gaining upon the fugitive, expecting at every moment to see him in advance; and he slowed down to an easy trot, keeping in the deeper snow to muffle the sound of his horse's hoofs.

The trail crossed a narrow creek. The water was frozen at the edge, where snow had

gathered, but in the middle it was flowing swiftly over the stones and making a tinkling sound as it swept round the boulders.

Roger rode down the steep and slippery bank and urged his reluctant mount into the cold stream. At the farther side he halted abruptly, searching in vain for the footprints of the scout. He could not find them, and it was some moments before he guessed at the Indian's ruse.

Green Grass had heard his approach.

The broncho's feet kicking against a stone, its panting breath, a snort, or even the creaking of the saddle or the champing of the bit, would not be lost upon the sensitive ear of a practised Indian scout. Green Grass had taken to the water to cover his tracks, and in spite of the intense cold had waded along the stream where he would leave no betraying footmarks.

But which way had he gone? With the current or against it?

Roger Wingrove could not tell. He had been successfully checkmated. He was non-plussed. Green Grass had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him, leaving no slightest trace.

Obviously, it was useless to waste time in further search. Already Sergeant Silk must be blaming him for his prolonged absence, and wondering what had become of him.

What was to be done?

CHAPTER XVIII

SCOUT AGAINST SCOUT

WINGROVE could see no alternative but to give up the chase and make the best of his way back to the outfit, owning that he was beaten, admitting that he had done an exceedingly stupid thing in deserting his post.

He took off his gauntlets, pocketed them, and opened his fur overcoat to look at his watch. It was half-past two. He would be fortunate if he got back before dusk. And he had forgotten that Sergeant Silk would not be waiting for him, but pushing on and on to his destination.

He rode up the slope of the thickly wooded bank, hoping to get a last fuller view of the trail beyond and perhaps to discover the scout breaking cover.

But as he threaded his way among the trees a strange sound reached him from the unseen distance, breaking the silence. He drew rein, listening as it came nearer and nearer.

It was the unmistakable sound of the movements of travelling horses, mingled with human voices, the yapping of dogs, the cracking of a whip, and a curious rasping, dragging noise, which he did not at first recognise.

Presently he heard it more distinctly, and knew it to be caused by the dragging of loaded travois poles along the snow. With it there now came the crying of a child.

"Indians!" he decided in alarm, thinking at once of the probability of Poundmaker and his followers hastening along the trail to overtake and rescue their captured companions.

And yet, he reflected, Poundmaker's band, who were on the warpath, had no dogs with them, and certainly there were no children in their company.

No, it could not be Poundmaker.

He dismounted very quietly, and as quietly hobbled his broncho by tying both fetlocks together with a loop of his bridle rein, bringing the animal's muzzle down near to its hoofs.

Standing very still, and making no sound, he glanced about him to ascertain that no lurking enemy was near to creep up and rob him of his mount. Then he crept forward very

cautiously, very silently, gliding like a shadow from tree to tree, avoiding the overhanging branches, treading only on the soft carpet of snow, lest the snapping of a dry twig should betray him.

More than once he looked round to assure himself that his broncho was safe. He sniffed at the cold air. The resinous odour of burning pine wood came in a faint whiff to his nostrils.

He did not dare to go far, but he thought it his duty to find out what was happening beyond the trees, and discover, if possible, whether the Indians were more likely to be friendly than hostile.

In front of him there was a break in the closeness of the trees, and he went to it.

Emerging suddenly upon a shelf of rock overlooking a wide valley, he turned his gaze eastward to the opening of a narrow gulch between steep hills. Along its lower level, hardly a quarter of a mile away from him, a long train of mounted Indians approached.

Each of them, in addition to the animal upon which he sat, hunched up in his snow-covered blanket, led a captive pony, while to the rear

were dog teams pulling heavily burdened sledges, and more horses drawing travois loads and carrying women and children. Some of the Indians appeared to be wounded.

Trooper Wingrove did not ask himself why a big village of Redskins should be migrating in winter-time and in the midst of a snow-storm. It was unusual. He wondered where they intended to make camp for the night.

Turning an inquiring glance westward, he was surprised to see the black, conical shapes of about a dozen teepees. They were pitched on the trail along which Sergeant Silk and his prisoners had passed barely three hours before. He had very narrowly escaped riding right into them.

Only one fire as yet was lighted. Near it was an Indian on horseback, in the act of adjusting a chief's war-bonnet on his head, in place of the covering of fur which he had just removed,

Wingrove recognised that feathered head-dress.

"That's Poundmaker's lot," he told himself.

Then Poundmaker, drawing his blanket about his shoulders, pulled round his horse

and galloped over the snow to meet the approaching village.

It was clear that this meeting had been arranged. Reasoning with himself, Roger came quickly to the conclusion that the two detachments had been out on similar errands. They had both been raiding for horses.

But while Poundmaker had been repulsed at Gildersley's, his ally had met with success at another ranch. His captive ponies, his loads of loot, perhaps even the women and children, represented the result of his attack upon some settler's homestead and corrals.

And now it needed only that Poundmaker's scout, Green Grass, should run in with his report, when the combined bands would make up a party of braves to ride off in pursuit of the Red Patrol to rescue their captive brothers and wrest from Sergeant Silk the horses which he had so cunningly snatched from them.

Guessing at all this, Trooper Wingrove determined to ride back at once and with all possible speed to warn Sergeant Silk of the impending danger.

He congratulated himself upon having gained some important information. Sergeant

Silk might justly blame him for his impulsive desertion of his post; but he would surely forgive him on account of what he had learnt.

Nevertheless, there still remained the sharp regret that Poundmaker's scout had escaped. It was possible that Green Grass had already reached the encampment and volunteered to guide the braves on the trail of Sergeant Silk. And if he—Roger Wingrove—should lose his way in the snow——

He trembled to think of it, but he realised now that his own absence deprived the sergeant of at least one gun. Silk and Little Panther alone could not be expected to make a stand against a whole tribe of savages.

In all its aspects, the situation was desperate. Wingrove was keenly sensible of how much depended upon himself.

As the Indian chief galloped nearer to him, he was about to draw back and hasten to his waiting broncho, when he was suddenly conscious of a movement at the farther side of the tree against which he stood.

He held himself rigid, listening. He heard the sound of quick panting, and as he slowly turned his head he saw puffs of misty breath

rising into the cold air on a level with his eyes. Then a naked red hand planted itself against the tree, the fingers crisped up with cold.

Instantly his own hand shot out and seized it in a firm, strong grip by the thin, sinewy wrist.

Wingrove flung himself backward, dragging the hand with him, giving it an outward swing, and a bundle of humanity fell at his feet. He leapt upon it, caught at a second wrist, dropped his knees upon a pair of kicking legs, and stared menacingly down into the face of the scout for whom he had been searching.

"Got you!" he ejaculated in his schoolboy English,

Green Grass snarled at him savagely and bit at him like an infuriated wolf; but he was powerless to move.

Kneeling upon the Indian, Wingrove held him for many moments, wondering what to do, anxious above all things that his captive should not give him the slip.

Both of them heard the chief galloping by; and, lest the scout should give tongue in a cry

for help, Wingrove released his wrists and with his left hand gripped him by the throat, while with his right he swiftly drew his revolver and shoved the cold muzzle into the Indian's open mouth.

Green Grass shut his swollen and blackened eyes and his arms fell limp. He struggled no longer. Evidently he expected the hammer of the gun to fall, the bullet to put an end to the workings of his active brain; and in dread anticipation of the calamity which could but follow, the fellow closed his teeth on the ice-cold barrel of steel.

But there was no finger on the trigger. Nothing hurt him very much—nothing but the unresisting pressure of those strong fingers on his gullet.

He was kept in this awkward and exhausting position until long after Poundmaker had galloped past.

Trooper Wingrove was in no hurry to release him; but at length, when his face threatened to become as blue as his swollen eyelids, the choking pressure was relaxed and the cold tube of the revolver withdrawn from his mouth, to be pointed instead at the bridge of

his nose, where this same red-coated policeman's big fist had struck him.

His eyes were open now, and staring upward. He was wondering why the bullet was so slow in doing its work, why the trooper did not kill him outright instead of playing with him and prolonging the torture. He saw the revolver being lowered and returned to its less dangerous place in the leather pocket which it fitted so exactly.

Wingrove then turned him bodily over on his face.

"Now, I'm going to gag you," he declared.

Planting a knee on the small of the scout's back, he pulled round his haversack. He opened it and took from it a roll of narrow surgical bandage and a pair of scissors.

Drawing out a yard or two of the cloth, Wingrove enclosed a short piece of stick in it, lengthwise, slipping the ends of the stick through two small holes a couple of inches apart. This section of the bandage he forced like a bit between the Indian's jaws, tying the band behind his neck.

Then, from somewhere beneath his coat, he produced a pair of handcuffs, and deftly

fastened them on the scout's wrists. Finally, he cut off a long strip of the bandage and securely bound his ankles together.

"There!" he said, rising to his feet, deliberately winding up the remainder of the bandage and thrusting it, with the scissors, into his pocket. "I don't think you'll slip your anchor in a hurry."

Green Grass tried to turn himself over on his back, but failed. Wingrove helped him and covered him with his buffalo robe.

"Now that I've got you," he ruminated, "I suppose I must keep you and carry you all the way along the trail as my prisoner. Beastly nuisance!"

He looked again at his watch. His work of pinioning his captive had taken much more time than he had supposed; so much that the newly arrived contingent of Indians had already halted and dismounted near to the encampment of Poundmaker.

Many of the braves were raising the teepee poles, others were hobbling the horses, while squaws were opening bundles of provisions, carrying vessels to the creek for water, or taking axes to the trees for firewood.

Apart from the busy workers, Poundmaker and other headmen were gathered in a group and seemed to be holding a big talk. It was not hard to guess that the subject of their debate was connected with Sergeant Silk.

"Yes," said Trooper Wingrove, watching them for a few moments, "they're planning how they shall go to the rescue of their pals. It's time for me to cut."

He turned to go and fetch his broncho, wondering meanwhile whether to make his prisoner run behind him on a trail rope, or allow him a seat on the crupper.

Deciding upon the latter as the safer course, he went in among the trees, but came to an abrupt stop at sight of a blanketed figure beside the horse—an Indian in the act of mounting to the saddle.

Was there more than one? He glanced around apprehensively, and his hand gripped at his revolver. He saw but the one.

"Hold hard, there!" he called, running forward.

He grabbed at the Indian's arm, but seized only a fold of the blanket, which dropped, and, to his amazement, he saw that the Indian was

a woman. To his yet greater amazement, when she turned in affright with a little cry of alarm and faced him, he recognised her.

"White Plume!" he gasped. "*You—* here?"

His overcoat was unbuttoned, and she saw his scarlet tunic. She gazed astonished into his face, then caught at his arm, remembering him.

"Save me! Save me!" she pleaded, pointing back towards the encampment. "Quick! I have escaped. This broncho is of the Police, it is yours." She glanced at the branded mark on the animal's skin. "Oh, save me!" she repeated agitatedly.

Trooper Wingrove seemed to understand her distress without questioning. It was Little Panther's camp that had been raided, and she, White Plume, had been taken captive.

"Jump up, if you can," he cried, "while I slip back for something."

He had determined to abandon Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water. But he was not going to sacrifice his pair of handcuffs.

When he got to the scout's side he again took out his roll of bandage and cut off a



THE GIRL TURNED IN AFFRIGHT WITH A LITTLE CRY OF
ALARM AND FACED WINGROVE.

length of about two yards. This he used in place of the handcuffs, tying the man's wrists together securely enough at least to delay him in getting free.

"Give me half-an-hour's start, and then you can sling your hook," he said, once more covering the scout with his buffalo robe.

White Plume was already astride of the broncho. Wingrove handed her blanket up to her, gave her his fur mittens to wear, and mounted in front of her, taking the reins.

"Lay hold of my belt, White Plume," he instructed her. "I'm going to take you along the trail to Thirty Mile Bend, if we're not snowed up on the way. Sergeant Silk has gone there. And your husband—Little Panther—is with him. Hold tight!"

He felt her gloved hands clutching at him.

"Little Panther?" she exclaimed agitatedly. "That is a great thing that you tell me. But, oh, it is bad news that I have for him—bad, bad news!"

"Hush!" cautioned Wingrove. "Don't speak."

He rode down the slope and reached the

ford in safety. He crossed and found the trail.

“Now!” he urged his charger. “Now, Prince, off! Off for your life, and for ours that you carry. And for the honour of the Red Patrol!”

CHAPTER XIX

WHITE PLUME FINDS SIGN

"OFF, Prince! Off!" urged Wingrove.

With its double burden, his willing, well-trained broncho lowered its head and broke into a steady, racing gallop along the desolate, wintry trail, kicking up the dry snow like prairie dust from its plunging hoofs.

He knew that the deep track it was leaving in the wake would easily be seen and followed if the enemy should give chase. Speed alone could save him from their clutches.

But he had come down the wooded slope and forded the creek in silence. The sounds of the camp and the murmur of the running water must surely muffle the dull thud of the horse's feet in the soft thick carpet of snow.

He felt certain that he had been neither heard nor seen by the Redskins. He was equally certain that their scout, Green Grass, could not yet have contrived to break loose

from the cords that bound him and run down to the lodges to give the alarm.

Until White Plume's escape from her captors should be noticed in the camp, therefore, he could count upon there being no pursuit, and he rode on and on, conscious that if he had even a quarter of an hour's start the swiftest of Indian horsemen would fail to overtake him.

Assured of his present safety, he needed only to watch for remembered landmarks in the hills and trees that loomed ghost-like through the mist of falling snowflakes. They would give him his direction, and even yet he might hope to rejoin Sergeant Silk before nightfall.

"Are you all right?" he asked his companion, hitching himself forward on the saddle to afford her more room. "You won't fall?"

Little Panther's girl wife was well accustomed to riding pillion. She had a firm grip of the waistband of Roger's buffalo skin overcoat, and sat behind him secure on the cushion of his service blanket.

"White Plume will not fall off," she assured him.

"Keep a watch on our tracks," he ordered. "Are any of their scouts in sight?"

She clung to him closer and turned her head to glance back over her shoulder.

"No," she answered, when she had made sure. "But soon—very soon—they will find that their captive has taken wings. Then they will follow. The snow will not hold them back."

"How were you captured?" he questioned presently when they were crossing a level expanse of snow. "Was it by the gang that I saw just now coming through the gulch to join Poundmaker's lot?"

"That is so," she replied. "It is the village of Hairy Bear—an enemy for many winters of Little Panther. Hairy Bear must sure have known that Little Panther was away on the trail with the Red Patrol, and that the Reserve on Dead Moose Lake was not well defended. He came with his warriors and braves, it is two sleeps since. Like thieves in the night they came, when all was still. They stole many horses, many guns, many beaver skins. Four of our braves were killed and their scalps taken. White Plume was carried off as their captive."

She had spoken disjointedly, with many pauses.

"All that is bad news for Little Panther," said Roger Wingrove. "It's hard lines on him, after all that he lost by the fire. A good thing you escaped. How did you manage it?"

White Plume did not answer immediately. She was looking back through the steadily falling snow, searching for signs of a possible pursuit.

"It was by good fortune," she said at length. "When the village came to a stop and the braves dismounted to pitch their lodges, many squaws went in among the trees to gather wood. I—White Plume—went with them, to help; for it is the business of squaws to gather wood for the fires. And as I ran, to get warm, for my feet were as ice, I saw the trail of a horse. I knew it was not the horse of an Indian. I followed it. I found your broncho."

"And would have stolen him, eh?" added Wingrove. "A pretty fix I should have been in, if I hadn't stopped you in time!"

"White Plume would not have gone alone," the Indian girl gently protested. "She saw

that it was a broncho of the Mounted Police, saddled, bridled, branded with its troop number. She searched, and found the trail of its rider in the snow. She knew that he would not be far away from his horse, leaving his gun. He was near. She would have waited."

Roger Wingrove made no comment on this statement. His horse had slackened its pace to a trot and was labouring with difficulty over the snow, sinking fetlock deep at every step, giving warning that the further journey was not to be an easy one.

The flakes were falling more thickly now. The ruts made by Sergeant Silk's sledges, and the hoofmarks of his horses were visible only as shallow depressions on the smooth white surface; and Wingrove's own more recent tracks were scarcely to be recognised. The light footprints of Green Grass were almost entirely wiped out. Wingrove realised that he would soon have to trust wholly to the landmarks.

But even these were disguised by the layer of snow that covered them. Rocks that had been bare and rugged had become smooth

knolls, bushes were rounded into indistinguishable hummocks, and trees had assumed new shapes.

In the earlier part of the day the wind had been from the north-east, he remembered. Assuming that it was still blowing from that quarter, he could trust to its guidance for his direction. It was rising now and driving the snow before it in swirling clouds, filling the hollows and piling up high billows in the sheltered places.

Wingrove had almost forgotten his companion in his anxiety, until she caught at his arm. He supposed that she was cold, or afraid of falling.

"White Plume has been thinking," she said gently. "She has seen things. Perhaps her friend has seen them. He is not blind."

"Do you mean that the wind is rising and getting colder?" he asked.

He did not see that she shook her head.

"Look!" She pointed over his left arm to the side of the trail. "Look at the marks in the snow—the marks of hoofs. There is a rider in front of us. White Plume thinks it is an Indian."

Trooper Wingrove drove his broncho to the side and stared down at the suspicious marks. He was a little annoyed that the girl should be the first to notice the important sign. It was unmistakably the track of a horse, going quickly in his own direction. He traced it for some distance to a spot where the snow was shallow and the hoofmarks were more clearly defined.

"It is sure an Indian pony," White Plume declared. "It wears no shoes."

"Looks as if one of Poundmaker's scouts had come prowling around after us," Wingrove added. "He must have sneaked past us, to hide and attack us from ambush as we ride by."

"No," White Plume argued. "It is the old track that he follows. He has not picked up ours, or he would not have gone on. It is Sergeant Silk and Little Panther that he is tracking."

"I believe you are right," Wingrove acknowledged, urging his broncho onward. "But anyhow you need not be afraid. My revolver is loaded; so is my carbine. Can you shoot?"

He persuaded himself that the probability of running up against a hostile Indian did not disturb him. Nevertheless his eyes turned anxiously again and again to the stranger's tracks to estimate how far away he might be, and he had swung his revolver round to be ready to his hand.

Presently he observed something dark on the snow directly in advance of him. At first he thought it was a large bird, or some animal seeking food; but it did not move.

He rode up to it, and saw that it was a gunny sack. There was very little snow upon it: so little that he could see the initials "J. G." stencilled on the coarse fabric

Round about it were the marks of moccasins and the hoof prints of the same horse that he had been following. He quickly understood, and without any suggestion from his sharp-witted companion.

The empty sack belonged to Joe Gildersley. It had been used as a pillow for one of the wounded Indians in the sledges, and it had been dropped on the trail as a sign. The scout following on Sergeant Silk's tracks had discovered it and dismounted to examine it,

turning it over to shake off the loose snow and leaving it, perhaps as a sign to guide others whom he expected to come after him.

Roger Wingrove paid no further regard to it, and was about to move on when White Plume checked him.

"Wait," she said.

She drew the fur mittens from her hands and returned them to him, bidding him wear them. She was no longer cold, she explained.

"Wait," she repeated.

And before he realised what she intended, she had slipped to the ground and taken hold of the stiffly frozen sack, lifting it and going down on her knees to see what might be beneath it.

On the thin layer of snow which it had covered, she found a tiny bunch of twigs, each about an inch in length. She picked them up and handed them to Roger Wingrove.

"Count!" she said.

He counted the twigs. There were four-and-twenty.

She went back and returned to him with a second smaller bunch.

"These are all broken," she told him as he

took them from her. "They are the wounded Indians. Count them. And these," she added, opening her palm, "the feather is Little Panther; the piece of red tape with the knot in it is Trooper Wingrove; and the thread of silk——"

"My hat!" exclaimed Roger Wingrove. "That's clever of you! You're a ripping fine scout, White Plume, to have tumbled to the meaning so quickly!"

She shook her head and went to and fro wiping out the marks of her feet, finally standing on the sack where her small moccasins would leave no betraying impression.

He helped her to remount.

"There were twenty-five of the prisoners on horseback when we started from Gildersley's," he said perplexedly when they had resumed their journey, "and there are only twenty-four of these bits of stick. How could the chap that put them under the sack have known that one had escaped? It's queer. The Indian in front of us couldn't have found out. And yet I suppose it was him that planted the information where we've just found it!"

"No," his companion argued. "White

Plume thinks that the sign was left by the one who escaped."

Her quickness in arriving at this conclusion surprised Roger Wingrove.

"Why, of course it was," he exclaimed in agreement. "It was Green Grass, for a certainty. He left the message in case he should be caught before getting home to the encampment. And he was caught. I caught him."

CHAPTER XX

THE WHITE SCOUT

THEY went on without speaking for a while. The broncho was breathing hoarsely, labouring heavily to get through the deepening snow. Wingrove allowed the animal to take it easy climbing the steep incline of a hill. Here, the wind was blowing more fiercely, sweeping th now into great swirling drifts and blotting out every landmark and every trace of a footprint.

Beyond the farther side of the hill there was nothing but a wide expanse of untrodden snow. Dusk was falling. Soon it would be dark night.

Wingrove looked about him in dismay. Even the wind had ceased to be a guide upon which he could depend. It seemed to be blowing irregularly from all points between the north-west and the due east.

His pocket compass told him vaguely that

he was still riding in the desired direction; but this, after all, was of small assistance, since he did not know the exact bearings of either the place from which he had started or the place to which he wanted to go.

He did not admit to White Plume that he was even baffled. But to himself he was forced to own that he was not only baffled, but actually lost. He had counted at least upon finding the coulée where Sergeant Silk had made a halt; but he surmised now that he had gone past it, failing to recognise the altered features of tree and bush and sheltered hollow.

Slackening the bridle rein, he allowed his horse to go its own way.

"We've got no food," White Plume heard him say.

"We can make a fire," she said in return. "We have our blankets."

"Yes," he rejoined, "we can make a fire. There are trees in front of us. It is no use going any farther. We shall only get lost. We can't hope to find Sergeant Silk to-night."

Suddenly his horse came to a stop, panting and trembling. Wingrove supposed that its

hoofs were clogged with frozen snow. He was about to dismount when White Plume clutched at his arm.

"Hush!" she whispered in his ear in a voice of mysterious agitation. "Make no sound. Do not move. Look only to the trees over there!"

He raised his eyes and a cold shudder ran through him. He gripped tightly at the rein. His heart seemed to cease its beating.

Against the snow-whitened trunk of a pine tree he saw the dim, shadowy figure of a mounted Indian. An Indian? or was it a phantom—a spectre? He could hardly believe that it was a living, flesh and blood human being that he looked upon, or that the horse as well as its rider was not a ghost, so absolutely motionless were they both, so silent, so indistinct through the veil of swirling snowflakes.

The horse was white. The rider was white; his blanket and leggings and moccasins were white. Everything about him was white as the surrounding snow.

Wingrove felt the tight clasp of his companion's fingers relax and move from his arm. She seemed to be slipping from her seat

behind him. He turned in his saddle and flung round a hand to save her.

"All right," he said in a hoarse, unnatural whisper.

She was not falling. She was only bending over to get a fuller, more sure sight of the mysterious figure under the tree: for she, too, believed it to be a spectre.

When Roger Wingrove looked again, the Indian had disappeared, without a sound, as if he had melted into the air.

"I expect it was the ghost of some long dead warrior," he said, with an awkward laugh, assuming an indifference which was far from being real.

"Or else one of Poundmaker's scouts," White Plume suggested—"the one we have been following."

"We'll get out of this place," Wingrove decided. "It's haunted. I dare say it's the scene of some old-time battle."

He glanced from side to side. Something in the shapes of the bushes, in the position of the belt of trees, appeared to him vaguely familiar.

"We're in the coulée!" he cried. "This

is where we were when Green Grass gave us the slip. Here, hold the reins while I get down and pick out the frozen snow from Prince's hoofs."

Prince went along more easily after his hoofs had been cleared. Wingrove was more confident. His discovery of the coulée had given him the direction of the trail.

"We can find our way now," he assured White Plume. "I know exactly the way we've to take, and it's certain we shall come up to Sergeant Silk very soon. It's impossible for him or for any one else to drag that gang of prisoners through a storm like this. He's sure to be snowed up. I expect we shall see the light of his camp fires from the top of the next rise."

After he had passed the place from which he had turned back in pursuit of the escaping Green Grass, the way was strange to him, and he could only keep straight on in the one direction, guided by his compass.

He had not gone far when on coming abreast of a bluff of fir trees, White Plume again touched his arm.

"Stop!" she said. "Listen!—listen!"

He drew rein and the broncho stood still. He listened, but there was no slightest sound apart from the heavy breathing of the horse and the sougning of the wind in the firs.

"What did you hear?" he questioned. He had begun to trust her and to believe that her quick Indian senses could make no mistake.

"It was perhaps an echo," she answered—"the echo of your broncho's footsteps."

She turned and looked behind into the deepening twilight.

"But no," she added with a catch in her breath. "It is again the white scout. He follows on our trail like a wolf that is hungry."

Wingrove pulled round in time to see the mysterious scout riding slowly, silently as a shadow, into the deep gloom of the trees.

Waiting for him to reappear, Wingrove drew his revolver.

"Scout or spirit, he shall not scare you again," he declared.

There was a movement among the trees. A heavy lump of snow fell from one of the laden branches. He fired.

"That will stop him," he said, with a dig of his spurs.

Prince went off with a new energy, plunging through the snow, sheltered from the wind by the trees. The flakes were falling less thickly now, and at the end of the wood they had almost ceased. Wingrove could see far ahead of him and was looking out for the glow of light from Sergeant Silk's camp fires. But instead of the hoped for light he once more saw the white scout, galloping onward as if to head him off.

The ground sloped downward, and soon the scout disappeared into the valley beyond. Wingrove kept his revolver handy. Suddenly he was aware of the sound of hoofs crunching in the snow on his other side.

"Listen!" cried White Plume. "There is more than one! There are two. We are between them!"

Wingrove could not deny that the sounds that came to him seemed to be of horses galloping towards him from two directions. But he assured his companion that one was only the echo of the other. The sound from his left stopped abruptly, however, while the other continued, coming to him now from behind.

White Plume glanced backward.

"It is a white horse," she said, "but it is not the same. Quick! Quick! he is gaining on us!"

Wingrove urged his broncho, but to no purpose. Instead of increasing his speed, Prince obstinately slowed down, then swerved as if about to fall from sheer exhaustion.

As he swerved, Wingrove caught a glimpse of a horseman directly in front of him. It was the white scout. He had come to a halt, and had raised his gun to his shoulder, waiting ready to fire when his intended victim should give him a sure mark.

Roger Wingrove brought his right hand round; but his horse was curvetting restlessly. White Plume was losing her balance, and to save herself from falling, she seized the trooper's arm and his weapon fell to the ground.

The white scout took aim. There was a shot; but it was not from his gun. It was fired by the horseman in the rear, and not at Roger Wingrove, but at the scout himself, who swayed over and fell into the snow, dropping his gun as he fell.

Wingrove looked round in amazement as the

rider who had so luckily intervened came up to his side. He had made sure that it was another of Poundmaker's scouts. White Plume looked also, and it was she who first recognised their deliverer in the darkness.

"Little Panther!" she exclaimed.

Little Panther caught at one of her outstretched hands.

"What is this?" he cried. "White Plume—here? How?"

Very rapidly she told him, speaking in their own tongue, which only they understood.

Wingrove dismounted to recover his pistol. When he found it and returned, he said to the Indian—

"Where is Sergeant Silk?"

Little Panther answered him quietly—

"He is where he intended to be. He has taken his prisoners into the fort at Thirty Mile Bend. There he is waiting, waiting until Little Panther shall bring in the trooper who deserted his post. Come. For it is not well that Sergeant Silk should be kept waiting."

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRUANT'S RETURN

"SAY, Sergeant, you've got a heap more faith in the scouting abilities of that Indian of yours than I should have. It wasn't a whole lot of good your sending him out on a night like this, was it?"

Sergeant Silk shook the frozen snow from his fur overcoat, and, folding the garment very precisely, laid it across the lid of a packing-case, with his mittens and busby on top of it. Then he approached into the warmth of the stove that burnt red-hot in the middle of the store-room, and stood under the light of the hanging lamp to answer the man who had spoken to him.

"Perhaps you don't know that particular Indian quite so well as I do, Bunny," he said. "I allow that the snow has wiped out all tracks. It's pitch dark out there, too. But

if Trooper Wingrove is within a dozen miles of this shanty, Little Panther will sure find him and bring him in."

He seated himself on the edge of a bale of fox-skins.

"If I hadn't had faith in his scouting abilities, I shouldn't have agreed to his going," he added. "Very likely I should have gone myself, or sent you, or Sinclair; or else have left Wingrove to find his own way to shelter."

Bunny Rushmere shook his head.

"You wouldn't have left him in the lurch," he averred, bending forward to lift a pot of caribou stew from the stove; "you wouldn't have left a dog or a horse to wander about, lost in the snow. You'd have taken pity on him."

Sergeant Silk reached for the pot and poured some of the hot stew into a tin bowl.

"Pity? Well, if you like to call it pity—yes. You see, Wingrove is new to the game. He doesn't know his way about on this trail, and would soon lose his bearings. Besides, he is not blessed with a great deal of physical courage."

Bunny Rushmere looked across at the sergeant curiously.

"Ah! You have discovered that, have you?" he asked.

"He has admitted it," returned Silk. "He has told me more than once that he considers himself a coward. I suppose it is possible for a man to inherit weak nerves and a lack of ordinary pluck. What?"

"You appear to have heard the story of his father's cowardice?" pursued Bunny.

"Exactly," Silk nodded. "You knew him—the father?"

"We were in the same regiment. Yes, I knew him. But that was before his disgrace, and there was never any occasion that tested his courage that I can remember. You can't say whether a fellow is plucky or the reverse until you try him in a situation that calls for bravery. Say, why did Roger quit your outfit and you with that crowd of prisoners and ponies to look after? He ought to have held on to you, of course."

"Why did he quit," Silk repeated with a shrug. "Not by my orders. He just went. I suppose he felt zealously responsible when one of the prisoners gave us the slip. So he rode after him, to round him in."

"And you pushed on without his help—you alone, with only Little Panther to help you? Gee! That was a tough job."

"Why, certainly. I couldn't wait. Pound-maker was on our track. I wanted to corral the horses here and lock up the prisoners before dark—before the snow got too deep. Naturally I did not expect him to be absent very long, knowing that he was mounted and the other on foot. So I pushed on, trusting to him to overtake us."

"No one else in the Force could have herded the crowd along as you did, Sergeant," said Bunny Rushmere, rising to turn the slabs of caribou steak that sizzled in the frying-pan.

Silk had nearly finished his dish of stew. Suddenly he looked up, holding his spoon poised, listening intently.

"Say, did you hear that shot?" he questioned.

Bunny glanced round at him sharply.

"I heard something like a horse kicking against its stall," he answered.

"It was a rifle-shot," Sergeant Silk declared with conviction, "a mile away; perhaps more. Sound travels a long distance over snow.

Stand quiet for a bit and listen for another. Likely it's Wingrove signalling for a sign. Poundmaker's scouts can hardly have followed him so far."

There was no repetition of the sound. But Silk continued to make conjectures as to its meaning. He was sure that it was a rifle-shot. Finally, he came to the conclusion that Little Panther had fired off his gun in the hope of Roger Wingrove hearing the report, and that, since there was no audible response to the signal, Wingrove was still too far away for the sound to reach him.

Assuming that this was the case, Silk could only believe that Wingrove had taken shelter from the snow to wait until daylight, or else that he had pursued the escaping scout farther than was wise, and so had fallen into the clutches of the Indians in the rear.

There was the other possibility, that Green Grass had turned upon his pursuer and overcome him.

Silk's anxiety increased as he considered this latter possibility. He began to blame Roger Wingrove more than ever for his indiscretion. But he resolved to wait for an hour, and then,

if neither Wingrove nor Little Panther arrived, to go out himself and join in the search, first assuring himself that his prisoners and the horses were safe and well guarded.

In the meantime he sent his telegraphic message to the nearest settlement, asking for help in case Poundmaker should dare, in spite of the snow, to approach and make an attempt to rescue the captive Indians. He had been just in time to get the message through; for now the wires were broken down by the weight of snow, and all further communication was cut off.

Here at Thirty Mile Bend, however, he was not helpless.

The fort was not only protected by a small patrol of the Mounted Police, but there was also a company of men in charge of the Hudson's Bay trading post, with two or three trappers within the enclosure of the stout stockade.

With all these experienced frontiersmen to support him, Sergeant Silk was ready to resist a much larger and stronger force than Poundmaker was likely to bring to an attack.

But he did not expect that Poundmaker would be so daring as to approach within striking distance of the fort. If he were advancing at all, it would only be on the chance of Sergeant Silk being so unwise as to make camp in the open, instead of forcing a march to Thirty Mile Bend.

The hour went by, and still there was no sign to tell what had happened to Trooper Wingrove.

Silk muffled himself up and went out to the stables for his broncho. He had hardly got halfway across the yard when a shout hailed him from beyond the stockade.

The sledge dogs howled and barked, lighted lanterns gleamed upon the snow from opened doors. The heavy gate was flung open, and Sergeant Silk strode forward to discover Roger Wingrove riding up, followed by Little Panther and White Plume.

If Roger Wingrove expected to be welcomed with open arms on coming through his adventure in safety, he was greatly mistaken.

Sergeant Silk regarded his return as a mere matter of course, and seemed at first to take less notice of him than he took of the young

trooper's jaded and panting broncho. It was to Little Panther and White Plume that he gave most of his attention.

He helped White Plume to dismount, and conducted her within doors, leaving Wingrove to look after the three horses. And when they were all settled comfortably in the warmth, with food in front of them, it was to White Plume that he looked for an explanation of her strange and unexpected arrival.

He listened with close attention to her story of Hairy Bear's raid on the corrals at Dead Moose Lake, and of her capture and escape, and it was only when she had come to the end of her narrative that he turned to Roger Wingrove.

"So it seems after all that you did some good by your escapade," he remarked dryly. "You were lucky in being at hand to give help to White Plume. But where is the escaped prisoner that you raced off so desperately to recapture? You have come back without him. How is that? Did you fail? I have discovered since you came in that your carbine has not been fired."

He spoke sharply. Wingrove saw the look

of stern, unyielding directness in his eyes, and he was painfully embarrassed.

"I don't think I exactly failed," he faltered awkwardly.

"But you did not succeed," Silk retorted. "You did not bring in your man. He is alive, unwounded, free. It is nothing to me that you went out to do one thing and come back having done another. You went without authority, without my orders, even without my knowledge. And it was foolish for you to go, in any case you—who are new to the Force, little more than a tenderfoot—couldn't have hoped to get the better of an expert Indian scout. Green Grass knows the country: you do not. He is up to a hundred cunning tricks that you don't understand. When you discovered that he had escaped, you should have come to me and reported the matter, leaving it to me to decide what to do."

He was striding restlessly to and fro in the store-room as he spoke. It was easy to see that he was seriously vexed.

"Did you see your man at all?" he demanded. "Did you get on his track?"

"Yes," Wingrove answered gloomily. He

had expected Silk's commendation for what he had done; and instead he was being blamed as if he were a deserter. "Yes," he repeated, "I kept on his track all the time, and I captured him. I was going to bring him back when White Plume turned up, so I brought her instead."

"Quite right," Silk nodded curtly. "That was something to your credit. And you allowed Green Grass to escape, I suppose? Giving him a chance of putting Poundmaker on our track?"

"I gagged and bound him," Wingrove explained, "and left him to get away as best he could. What else could I have done? I couldn't have taken his life. As for my having failed—well, I found out about Hairy Bear's village joining Poundmaker. I'm able to warn you that they looked like starting off on your track to rescue your prisoners. Surely that should count in my favour!"

"It is as well that I should know it," acknowledged Sergeant Silk. "But, you see, Little Panther, if I had sent him, would have accomplished all that you did, and I should have had your help in bringing the prisoners

along. You must not forget that you are of the Red Patrol, and that one trooper is worth half-a-dozen friendly Indians when it's a question of keeping a gang of captive rebels in check."

Somehow Wingrove felt that he looked exceedingly small in Silk's eyes. He wanted more than anything to gain the sergeant's approval; and he had tried to gain it—tried his hardest, but only to be blamed.

It was mortifying that whenever he did anything to try to prove his courage, Sergeant Silk was never present as a witness of it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GAP IN THE PALISADE

DURING the night the snow-clouds cleared and the moon broke through, giving so much light that the white land was visible for miles around the fort.

Little Panther awoke Sergeant Silk to ask permission to go out scouting. He suspected that the enemy, eager to rescue their friends, would take advantage of the light and press forward. He hoped that they would do so, and thus give him the chance for which he now thirsted of taking vengeance upon the warriors who had devastated his home and carried off his beautiful young squaw as their captive.

Silk agreed, and the Indian went out on his snow-shoes, gliding like a shadow from point to point with senses sharpened by hatred to detect every sign that would help him.

He reasoned that, on failing to discover

Sergeant Silk's outfit snowed-up on the open trail, Poundmaker would still push on to a halting-place conveniently near to the fort, in order to take breath before dashing to the assault. And in this he was correct.

Climbing stealthily to the ridge of one of the nearer hills, he discovered the combined fighting forces of Hairy Bear and Poundmaker encamped in the shelter of a coulée almost within gunshot distance of the stockade. He counted their lodges, estimated the number of their horses, judged of their intentions, and hastened back to inform the little garrison of what he had seen.

"That's all right," said Sergeant Silk, on being awakened for a second time. "We are quite ready for them."

And he got up and placed his men at their various posts, returning to his bunk to finish his sleep.

He had hardly closed his eyes when two horsemen arrived, to be challenged by Bunny Rushmere at the gate. They gave the password, and were admitted. They were a patrol of the Mounted Police who had been overtaken by the snowstorm on their way to Dunniker's

Hope, and had come aside to Thirty Mile Bend for shelter.

Silk's presence here was a surprise to them. They had expected to find him at Dunniker's Hope, where they were to have delivered a message to him from headquarters.

The message instructed him that, since the rebel rising had now become a serious menace to the settlers, warnings were to be sent round to all the outlying ranches on the Saskatchewan Trail. The homesteads were to be shut up and the families, with their live stock, were at once to be removed under police escort to the refuge of Fort Battleford.

"Good," said Sergeant Silk, when the message was repeated to him.

He appreciated the wisdom of this plan to protect the ranchers. Instead of being in their isolated homesteads, exposed to the constant danger of attack, they would all be concentrated in one stronghold, protected by the police, while the police themselves would be better able to cope with the rebels by the circumstance that they need no longer be scattered in lone patrols.

For the present, Silk could make no definite

plans. He was expecting at every moment to hear that Poundmaker and Hairy Bear were advancing, and he was busy in the fort completing his preparations.

"We've got to keep them at a distance, Sergeant," said Corporal Rushmere. "If they're allowed to creep up to the stockade and get in touch with your prisoners, we shall all be wiped out, see?"

"Exactly," acknowledged Silk. "It's the prisoners they're after. They'll try to get them out. And when they've got them out, we may as well throw up our hands. But they're not going to get them out, Bunny. They're not going to come within fifty yards of this gate."

Bunny looked at the sergeant in perplexity.

"You're going to prevent them?"

"Why, certainly."

"I should like to know how," pursued Bunny. "Remember, there's a big crowd of them. Little Panther calculated there must be at least four hundred. How are you going to stop them?"

Sergeant Silk smiled.

"It is no secret," he said. "You have two

seven-pounder guns locked up in the shed there, with any amount of ammunition. Get them into position outside the stockade gate. Train them on to the level ground between the two hills yonder, and when the Redskins appear in full view, let them know the meaning of artillery, see?"

He took a key and opened the shed, and the two guns were brought out, looking astonishingly bright and businesslike.

"I never knew that they were here," admitted Corporal Rushmere. "I thought that shed was stuffed with useless lumber. Say, they're bright!"

"Exactly," nodded Silk. "I overhauled them, only a week ago, while you were away on the Rattlesnake Patrol."

The pieces were put in position on the high ground, one on either side of the gate commanding the trail by which the enemy were expected to approach. Silk himself loaded them. Then he made a final tour of the fort to assure himself that the prisoners and horses were secure and the men all at their appointed posts.

Lights were extinguished to make it appear

to the enemy that the garrison was asleep. Only one outside fire was left burning, in the middle of the barrack yard. Here Roger Wingrove was stationed doing sentry-go between the fire and the gate, while beyond the gate Little Panther kept watch, pacing to and fro between the two guns.

The night was bitterly cold, with a hard frost, and a keen north-east wind, and a clear, bright moon that made everything distinct. Sergeant Silk and most of his companions of the police were under cover in the store-room, planning their future movements.

"It doesn't seem necessary that we should go on to Dunniker's Hope now," said one of the two who had come in for shelter. "Every one there will be able to get through by the railroad, if it isn't blocked by the snow."

"Some one ought to go and see what has happened at Little Panther's section on Dead Moose, though," said Silk. "We've got to look after the friendly Indians. The rest of us had better make westward. There's Mrs. Medlicott's place—Rattlesnake Ranch—where they usually have a big herd of ponies. I think I will go there myself. Sinclair will

take the homesteads along Lame Duck Lake."

"If you're going to send some one in Dead Moose direction," interposed Bunny Rushmere, "there's a road agent doing a lot of mischief round there—Tony Meadows. He might manage to collar him."

"He ought to have been collared long ago," said Silk. "I will send young Wingrove."

Wingrove at this moment pushed open the door.

"There's a scout prowling around this side of the creek," he announced. "And Little Panther says he hears hoofs."

"Keep your eye on that scout," Silk ordered. "Don't let him come too near." He stood up. "Come along, boys," he added, and he led the way out into the barrack yard, where he stationed his companions near the screened fire.

Taking Duncan Smith, the overseer of the Hudson's Bay post, with him, he took up a position beside the two guns. Little Panther glided up to him and pointed across the moonlit snow to the level ground between the two hills.

"They come," he said.

"Where are their scouts?" Sergeant Silk inquired.

The Indian indicated three directions.

"Creeping round to the rear," Silk observed. And turning to Roger Wingrove he said: "Get round to the back of the prisoners' shed, Wingrove. Keep a sharp watch about the bushes, and if you see any Indians sneaking up, don't hesitate to shoot. And don't forget your way back to the gate in case you have to take shelter inside. You're not timid, are you? I will give Sinclair the job if you like. But I want some one here who has good eyesight, and I think that I can rely upon you."

When he returned to the guns the enemy were in sight, winding out of the valley like insects in the distance. They were still riding in single file, but presently as they approached over the snow, they began to spread out.

"Are you ready, Smith?" Silk asked quietly.

"I'm ready, Sergeant," Smith answered, squinting along the sights of the gun.

"Fire!" Silk commanded.

Smith was quick to obey, and the timbers of the fort shook with the concussion. His shot

shrieked through the wintry air, and the report was echoed and re-echoed from the far-away hills. The Indians scattered in wild confusion, yelling as they struggled to control their terrified horses.

"It looks as if that was enough," remarked Sergeant Silk. "But we may as well give them another to let them know that they haven't caught us napping."

He fired his own piece, aiming over their heads, and the confusion became a mad panic. Yet in spite of the warning, some of the Redskins wheeled round and attempted to advance, and as they came within range Little Panther opened fire with his rifle, while Rushmere, Sinclair, and two others of the police stood ready to join in.

At the rear of the fort Roger Wingrove was watching the enemy's scouts. He had seen three of them. Two had dismounted, but the third had disappeared.

From the deep shadow of a buttress he watched these two crawling up the slope. He could see the snow falling in clumps from the bushes as they crawled nearer and nearer, and he was waiting with a finger on the trigger

of his rifle until one should show himself. But when the seven-pounder crashed out, all became still, and he could detect no slightest movement.

Behind him at the other side of the timber walls the prisoners were clamouring, yelling, and hammering with their fists in their attempt to get free.

Wingrove still kept his eyes upon the motionless bushes, but could see no sign.

Suddenly the creaking of timber at the far side of the buttress drew him out from the shadow, and in the moonlight he saw the bent figure of an Indian who was in the act of wrenching the timbers apart with a crowbar which he had managed to force into a gaping seam.

For a moment Wingrove hesitated. In that moment the upright log swayed outward.

The Indian clutched at it with both hands, and was tearing it down when the trooper leapt upon him, wrestled with him for an instant, overpowered him, and with an adroit swing forced him bodily against the gap.

The Redskin writhed and twisted like a snake to free himself, but a knee gave him a

further thrust inward. As he turned, the moonlight struck upon his paint-smeared face and swollen eyes, and Wingrove saw that it was the face of Green Grass.

With a kick he sent the scout sprawling within, and himself filled up the gap, standing confronting the yelling, frantic crowd inside, his glittering revolver held ready to shoot down the first who dared to come near him.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE NICK OF TIME

ROGER WINGROVE's position was desperate. The captive Indians and half-breeds thronged about the breach in the wall of their prison, clamouring and fighting in the darkness to force a way out through the narrow gap which he guarded. They swayed in a compact human mass against the stout timber uprights, trying to break yet another of them down.

The logs creaked and groaned and shook ominously under the repeated assaults. Wingrove pressed his shoulder farther into the opening and brought his right hand round to hold the excited crowd at bay under the menace of his Enfield revolver.

At sight of the dreaded firearm glittering in a shaft of moonlight, they shrank into the farther corners. He moved his threatening aim quickly from face to face; but he hesitated to shoot. He remembered that the prisoners

were weaponless. Sergeant Silk had carefully searched them all to assure himself that none of them concealed a knife, a gun, or a tomahawk in the folds of his blanket.

They seemed to know that he would not fire upon them; but one, a young half-breed, more daring than the others, leapt forward to seize the weapon.

Wingrove saw the man's movement in time, and as a hand darted out to snatch at the shining barrel, he pulled at the trigger.

The half-breed staggered back with shattered fingers, and his fellow prisoners made a rush forward, snarling angrily.

The scout, Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water, was not one of those who had been searched. He had left his crowbar outside, where it had dropped when he had been seized; but he was still armed with his scalping knife.

When Wingrove had flung him inward, he had fallen to the floor under the feet of his companions whom he had come to rescue. But now he struggled to his knees, and, drawing his knife, crept into the shadow, making his way nearer to the opening. He had seen the

young trooper's face in the moonlight and recognised it.

Twice before had this same policeman got the better of him. Green Grass did not intend that the third occasion should be successful. He meant to pay back old scores, and at the same time make certain of fulfilling his purpose of setting his friends at liberty .

He rose to his feet, and with his back against the wall drew nearer still, hiding his knife lest the moonlight gleaming upon its blade should betray him.

For a moment he paused, while Roger Wingrove half turned to confront the Indians stealing up on the other side. Green Grass then leapt at him with weapon raised to strike. But as he leapt his foot tripped on the projecting end of the fallen log and he missed his aim. The point of his knife, meant for Wingrove's chest, struck only the metal buckle of his shoulder strap, doing no harm.

Roger Wingrove staggered under the blow, and in saving himself from falling he jerked his finger on the trigger. There was a flash, a loud report, and Green Grass dropped his weapon, lurching back with a bullet buried in

his shoulder. He stooped to pick up the knife to renew the attack.

Wingrove seized him and they rolled over, writhing and struggling desperately for the mastery, while the prisoners beyond them, seeing the way clear, made a rush for the opening.

Wingrove's first shot had been heard at the front of the fort. The firing of the two field guns had ceased. Their shrieking, bursting shells had spread terror among the Redskins, who were retreating in panic across the moonlit snow.

"That is all right," said Sergeant Silk with satisfaction, watching them riding away in wild disorder. "They won't come back in a hurry."

He stood away from the guns and was about to return into the barrack yard, when the pistol shot from the rear of the buildings broke the spell of silence.

"Ah!" cried Sergeant Silk, coming to a standstill and listening. "Sounds as if those scouts were closing in! Take charge here, Smith, while I slip round and see what's happening with Wingrove."

He knew that it was a revolver and not a rifle that had been fired, and he judged by this fact that the weapon had been discharged at close quarters. He strode quickly round the outer side of the stockade, drawing his own revolver as he did so.

Before he had passed the second buttress Wingrove's second shot was fired.

Silk ran forward, saw the fallen plank and the breach that it had made, with a thin film of powder smoke issuing outward into the moonlit air.

He dashed up to the opening and came into collision with a stalwart warrior who was wriggling his way out, entangled in his blanket. Silk thrust him back, giving him at the same time a blow on the side of the head which further quickened his movements and cleared the gap for his own entrance.

A stifled cry for help drew his glance to the ground as he stepped within, and he discovered Roger Wingrove struggling to get free from the knee of an Indian who was on top of him with a hand at his throat. The Indian's buckskin jacket was white with frozen snow, betraying that he was not one of the sheltered

prisoners, but one of Poundmaker's scouts newly come in.

Silk's tall frame filled the gap and shut out the direct light of the moon. For a moment he could not be sure which of the two struggling figures at his feet was Roger Wingrove; but as he moved aside he saw a dark, uplifted hand with a knife gripped in the bony fingers.

Without hesitation, he sprang forward, seizing the scout by the shoulder that was wounded and hurling him bodily backward.

Relieved of the Indian's weight and the agony of his long nails digging into his throat, Wingrove scrambled to his feet and leapt into the shaft of moonlight that came in at the gap: not to escape, but to turn once more and confront the excited throng with his pistol held ready to fire.

Sergeant Silk was already at his side, standing with a foot on the scout's scalping knife. He fired two random shots in quick succession. The bullets rattled among the rafters. The prisoners scattered in fear and confusion.

"Slip out behind me and blow your whistle," Silk ordered sharply.

Roger obeyed, and the shrill summons brought Bunny Rushmere, Sinclair, and Little Panther to the spot.

Silk picked up the knife, and backed out into the open, still sweeping his revolver muzzle from side to side. The fallen baulk of timber was propped up, and Sinclair and Little Panther were ordered to stand against it and hold it in position until Smith should come and fix it securely.

"You will stay here with them, Rushmere," Silk added, "and if there is another attempt to break out, shoot."

He turned then to Roger Wingrove.

"Are you hurt?" he asked quietly.

"No," Roger answered, breathing heavily; "only a scratch on my neck, and perhaps a crack in one of my ribs. Here is the crowbar that the scout was using."

"Bring it," said Silk. "Come along with me."

Roger shouldered the iron bar and followed the sergeant round to the gate.

"Do you mean to tell me that you allowed one of their scouts to crawl up and break in without your seeing him?" Silk demanded to

know. "What were you there for, eh? I told you to keep sharp watch and shoot the first Redskin who came near."

"Yes, I know," Wingrove faltered awkwardly. "But there were two others as well. They came different ways, and that chap—Green Grass—sneaked up while I was watching the other two."

"Green Grass?" Sergeant Silk repeated in surprise. "Oh, indeed! And it was Green Grass who was mauling you when I turned in, was it?"

They were at the main gate now. Silk instructed Smith to nail up the breach, and while Smith went to the store-room for a lantern and tools, the sergeant strode to and fro in front of the fort looking searchingly across the snow to where the retreating enemy showed as tiny black specks in the distance.

He went to the far corner of the stockade, then returned. Wingrove saw him take up his carbine which he had left against the wheel of one of the seven-pounders. He carried it in the crook of his arm to one of the farther buttresses and stood there, peering into the darkness.

Roger went up to him. In the silence he heard the crunching of hoofs on the frozen snow, and, following the direction in which Sergeant Silk was looking, he saw two horsemen galloping swiftly away as if to join in the retreat.

"I guess those are your other two scouts," said Silk.

He raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired, deflected his aim and fired again.

One of the horses stumbled and fell, staggered to its feet and fell again. The other galloped off, riderless, pursued by an Indian on foot.

Silk lowered his smoking gun and turned once more to Wingrove.

"You are sure it is Green Grass?" he inquired,—"*Green - Grass - Growing - In - the - Water*, the scout that escaped from our outfit?"

"Yes, Sergeant," Roger answered. "I couldn't mistake him. I saw him wrenching the palings apart with the crowbar, helped by the prisoners from inside. When they had forced an opening—and they were not long about it—I shoved him inside and——"

"Exactly," Silk nodded. He did not need any further explanation. "I notioned that that was the way of it when I saw the snow on his parka. I don't wonder at his outwitting you. I told you that he is one of the slimmest scouts on the Saskatchewan Trail. Say, you're lucky to have got quit of him with no more than a scratch. Very lucky."

"He would have done for me for a certainty if you hadn't come to my help," Roger acknowledged with gratitude. "You saved my life, Sergeant. I am no end indebted to you."

Sergeant Silk glanced aside at him by the light of the fire as they crossed the barrack yard.

"It is not our habit to thank each other for things like that," he said softly. "We do our duty : that is enough. Come. We will go and make sure that the prisoners are safe. Fetch a lantern, and the key. If I'm not in error, Mr. Green - Grass - Growing - In - the - Water has a wound in his shoulder that will need surgical treatment."

He stooped and wiped his hand on the snow, leaving a red stain.

“You would have been excused if you had planted that bullet in a more vital spot,” he added. “You must beware of Green Grass in future. Indians nurse their vengeance for years. They never forgive an injury.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RIEL REBELLION

It was Saturday night in the crowded barrack-room at Regina. The warm air was dense with tobacco smoke, and through the mist the troopers' red tunics glowed dimly under the lamplight.

Some of the men sat at the long benches playing draughts, dominoes or cards, some were busy cleaning harness or firearms, polishing buttons and spurs, darning stockings or patching holes in their fur mittens and moccasins; others, who had been on patrol-duty at the far outposts of the wilds where the world's news had not reached them, were making up arrears by reading the newspapers, and a few were striving amid the distractions to write letters.

But all of them, whatever their occupation, were consciously listening to the silvery, mellow voice of one of their comrades who

stood by the piano on the little platform singing the favourite and familiar words of "Annie Laurie."

They made no sound as he sang, they almost stopped smoking. There was an appealing tenderness in his voice which compelled them to listen and to be silent until he came to the end; and even then there was a long hush before they broke out into noisy, boisterous applause.

They shouted for him to sing again, but he shook his head resolutely, stepped down from the platform and strode along the room with his handsome scarred face blushing almost as red as his tunic.

He paused beside two of his companions who had just resumed an absorbing game of chess, and those who stood near, watching the contest, instinctively made room for him. With quick understanding, he saw through the difficulty over which the two players were puzzling, and smiled when after a long hesitation a bishop was moved.

"I should have moved the king," whispered a young fellow at his elbow. "Wouldn't you, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Silk shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Not unless I wanted to lose the game."

He glanced aside at the one who had spoken.

"Hullo, Wingrove!" he nodded in greeting. "You've come back, eh? That's all right. Brought Silver Jim in as your prisoner, too, I hear. Say, you did well to capture him. He's a tough customer. I hope the colonel complimented you on your success. You deserved it. He's going to keep a special eye on you during this campaign."

"Then it's settled that I am going?" Wingrove questioned anxiously.

"Why, certainly," said Silk. "You had better overhaul your kit, ready for inspection."

Roger Wingrove had come back to headquarters only that evening, and had not realised the urgency of the marching orders which had been issued.

There was no excitement here in the barrack-room. Excepting that an unusual number of his comrades were present, he could hardly have guessed that the Mounted Police were actually preparing to set off in a body

upon a serious and perhaps dangerous military expedition, which might mean death to many of them. But as he went about the room he overheard their comments and conjectures.

"What's the good of talking?" said one. "War? Battle? At this time of year, and the land deep in snow? Where's the grass for their ponies to come from? They can't fight us before June."

"Yes, but this Louis Riel's a practical man," said another. "Look what he did on Red River in 1870!"

"Ran like a jack-rabbit," said Trooper Sinclair. "He and his whole army took to their heels as soon as they saw Garnet Wolseley's column coming along. He's up there in the north right now, with four or five hundred half-breeds—old buffalo runners—simply spoiling for a scrap with us. Pound-maker's on the warpath; so's Hairy Bear. We've got to fight the whole outfit of Crees. The Flying Dust Band are dancing. Yellow Quill and One Arrow have got their tails up, and the Sioux are out to howl. You bet your socks there's all of five thousand men, and d'you think they'll sit chewing gum until we

send east for an army? Who says they'll wait for grass?"

"Five thousand yelling Redskins, all armed with repeating rifles, and us hardly five hundred strong!" interposed another, aiming with a point of thread at the eye of a needle. "Seems the Red Patrol's going to be wiped out."

Wingrove listened to others who were discussing the causes of the rebellion.

The French-Indian half-breeds of the far north-west—descendants of the early French adventurers in Canada—had never fully yielded to British rule.

Engaged as travellers and hunters for the Hudson's Bay Company, they worked faithfully, trapping the fur-bearing animals on the creeks and in the forests, shooting buffalo on the prairies, and living amongst the Indians in their wigwam villages or apart in their own log cabins; but they cherished a hatred of the British race, and had again and again broken out in open revolt against the advancing settlers who occupied their hunting grounds, killed off the buffalo, took away their trade, and were driving them farther and farther towards the frozen north.

Their grievance was only an imaginary one, for there was abundant room for all.

Six hundred miles of unbroken prairie still lay between them and the nearest Canadian village, and while the white settlers claimed a share in the earth's bounty, they at the same time introduced wise laws and protected both Indian and half-breed, with an efficient system of police.

But the tide of immigration from Europe was rolling ever westward, the stronger, more enterprising race was getting the upper hand, and the breeds were becoming discontented because a surly Government was denying them a title to their farms.

In their discontent, they listened to the persuasions of Louis Riel, an ambitious fanatic of their own mixed blood, who played upon their ignorance and superstition and told them that the whole of Canada might be theirs if only they would follow his advice.

He urged them to take a firm stand against the white settlers, to wear their old-time deer-skin shirts and take their rifles for war. The Indians would help them, and he himself would be their leader. They would drive

away the white men and their hated Mounted Police. Then the bison would come back in vast herds to the plains, and there would be peace.

He claimed that he was inspired by the Great Spirit, Manitou, to give them this message. The breeds believed him, but the Indians demanded a sign which should prove to them that he had been appointed by the Great Spirit.

Louis Riel was ready to answer this demand. He had studied the almanac, and knew that on a certain day—March 17th—there would be a total eclipse, and he told them that on that day he would prove his medicine. He would blot out the sun and bring darkness over the whole earth.

They waited for the promised sign, and the eclipse came in its due time, whereupon Riel was hailed as a prophet, and there was no question as to his authority.

The Cree nation joined him with over two thousand warriors, and the larger tribe of the Blackfeet gathered in force.

The eclipse of the sun was the signal for the fighting tribes to rise, and straightway they

spread themselves like a scourge among the scattered homesteads, where they plundered, burnt, scalped and massacred.

The latest news brought in by scouts from the north was that the enemy were concentrating at Batoche, their capital on the south branch of the Saskatchewan river, and that they were threatening Fort Prince Albert, where many settlers and their families had taken refuge.

Prince Albert was the most northerly white settlement in the New World, seventeen hundred miles removed from civilised Canada, and three hundred miles from the Police headquarters at Regina. The place was unprotected.

The nearest Hudson's Bay post was at Fort Carlton, two 'days' journey across the snow. Carlton was a little fort in a valley of the North Saskatchewan, where buffalo runners in old times delivered their meat, to be carried away by yearly canoe fleets bound for the isolated outposts of the ultimate north, and it was now held by Troop D of the Mounted Police with some volunteers, who were themselves threatened by the hostile Indians.

Colonel Irvine, the commandant at Regina, was in a quandary. The situation was awkward.

The Dominion Government trusted him alone with his Red Patrol to preserve the peace and protect his fellow-subjects. They had sent him no assistance, and how was he to find an army to suppress the rising of these rebels who so greatly outnumbered the white inhabitants?

He had mustered all his available strength, but when the roll was called his total force was only ninety-six men, many of them, like Roger Wingrove, mere recruits. Yet he determined to do his best, and the best that he could do was to take his ninety-six mounted policemen and make a forced march to the relief of Prince Albert.

He started out on the Sunday morning to cover the three hundred miles that lay between him and his destination: three hundred miles of unbroken snowfield, where there was not a handful of food for man or horse.

His army was reduced to a convoy of sleighs—little, box-like jumpers with steel-shod runners, drawn by hardy half-bred bronchos,

heavily laden with forage and kit. Two seven-pounders made the sum of his artillery.

The snow was deep, hostile Indians might be encountered in many an ambush among the mountain ravines, but he had a perfect service of scouts, and with good discipline, good horsemanship and good luck, he succeeded in making that three-hundred-mile march at an average of forty-two miles a day.

They marched with scouts ahead, vedettes in their front, then an advance guard and rear-guard of cavalry covering the long procession of sleighs.

Roger Wingrove's place, as a mere recruit, was with the transport, trotting beside a sleigh, and it was not until the evening of the second day's march, when camp was pitched and the scouts were drawn in, that he made the discovery that amongst the Indian scouts was Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water.

"Isn't it rather risky our taking that chap along with us?" he asked of Sergeant Silk.

"The colonel doesn't think so," returned Silk. "And Little Panther is keeping a watchful eye on him in case of treachery. You'd better keep out of his way if you're

afraid of him. Of course he owes you a grudge. Otherwise he's all right, and he's a ripping good scout."

"Afraid?" Wingrove frowned and bit his lip in chagrin at the thought that Sergeant Silk should still suspect him of cowardice.

"It was the idea of his leading us into an ambush that was troubling me," he said. "But if you are not worrying over it, why should I?"

CHAPTER XXV

DUCK LAKE FIGHT

PROOF of the suspected scout's skill and of his honest intentions was given on the third day. There was a halt for rest at noon, and Green Grass came in to report that he had discovered the trail of a band of Indian braves in advance of the line of march.

The trail was a day old, he argued, because a thaw on the previous day had been followed by a hard frost at night, and the deep hoof-marks were frozen. There had been nineteen horses.

In the evening, Little Panther reported that the same band had encamped in a coulée two miles ahead. The colonel requested Sergeant Silk to ride forward and investigate. Silk took Roger Wingrove and Little Panther with him.

The three of them rode onward in the dark-

ness, and Little Panther led the way into the coulée, where they found one large lodge and counted nineteen hobbled ponies.

Silk and Wingrove dismounted and opened their buffalo overcoats to show the red of their tunics. Leaving their carbines behind, they went past a young Indian who was on guard duty and strode up to the flap of the wigwam through which they could see the flickering of a fire.

Silk drew the flap aside and entered, laying his revolver at the threshold. Wingrove did the same, but remained standing within ready reach of the two guns.

"How!" Silk said in greeting to a wizened-faced warrior who was crouched near the fire, smoking.

The warrior held out his left hand, and Silk went forward and took it. They spoke together for a long while in the Cree tongue.

Roger understood that the Indians were friendlies, and he supposed that Sergeant Silk was gathering information concerning the disposition of the tribes still on the reservations. But he noticed some of the braves in the background making signs to one another and

casting glances at the sergeant which he thought suspicious.

At length Sergeant Silk put forth his hand and asked the warrior to let him smoke the pipe of peace with him.

There were murmurs of disapproval among the braves, and the warrior, shaking his head, laid his pipe at his side and pointed to the door-flap.

"Very well, Big Dust," said Silk, "if that is how you feel about it, there is no use in my saying more."

He backed slowly towards where Roger Wingrove waited. But he had taken hardly three steps when one of the young braves rose to his feet, crouched down and crept nearer and nearer to him, brandishing a long knife with repeated forward thrusts of the fire-lit blade while he shouted, gesticulated, and worked himself up into a fury for the death-stroke.

Roger Wingrove pretended still to be at his ease, but every muscle and nerve of his body was strained as he held himself ready for a rush to join the sergeant.

"Don't move, Wingrove," Silk murmured. "Keep cool."

He himself was astonishingly cool. Perhaps his life, as well as Wingrove's, depended upon his coolness at that moment. He even stopped as though daring the Redskin to strike, keeping his eyes fixed on him.

"Well, Child of Light," he said calmly to the man with the knife, "why don't you strike? You've got your chance at last. You've waited for it a long time. Why don't you take it? You see I am unarmed. You see I am at your mercy. You coward—you woman—you're afraid to strike!"

The Indian lowered his weapon, muttered a vague threat, and was silent.

Sergeant Silk turned on his heel, picked up his revolver and shoved it into its holster, and with a glance backward over his shoulder strode out into the fresh cold air.

"That's all right," he said, buttoning his overcoat and walking with swinging strides towards his horse.

Roger Wingrove said nothing. He looked upon the incident merely as another example of Sergeant Silk's dauntless courage. But he envied that courage all the same, and wished in his heart that he could imitate it.

An opportunity for imitating it came to him unexpectedly on the following day. They had made camp on the Salt Plains, drenched all of them to the skin with a sopping thaw.

They set up their tents, wrung out their wet clothes and slept; but when *réveillé* sounded at half-past three in the morning the weather had changed, the frost was at twenty-five degrees below zero, and every man's clothes were stiff ice from the waist downward. Many of them were frost-bitten, and already several were snow-blind in spite of the goggles that all wore.

There was a delay in starting. Wingrove, who was acting as a kitchen orderly, had finished his work of getting the officers' breakfast ready, and was standing thawing the colonel's cavalry boots near the fire when Sergeant Silk strode up to him.

"Say, Wingrove," he said, "Sinclair's snow-blind, but you'll do. Get into your moccasins and come along with me. Oh, but I see you have them on already. That's right. Little Panther reports that there's some of the enemy's scouts prowling around. I want to see what they're up to. Come along!"

Roger accompanied him about a quarter of a mile from the camp, where they came upon a trail of six sets of footprints. These presently forked off in two directions, three one way, three another.

"I will track this lot," said Silk, "you follow the other."

"You'll come upon Green Grass," returned Roger, pointing downwards. "That's his footmark."

"Exactly," Silk nodded. "I thought so."

Roger went on, following the trail quickly. Beyond the first rise he came suddenly in sight of three strange Indians, standing at bay, back to back, in a gully.

At the same moment Green Grass and two other scouts appeared at the other end of the gully with Sergeant Silk following them up a considerable distance behind.

Two of the scouts called out to the Indians to surrender, but without effect. Instead of surrendering they turned to escape, but stopped abruptly at sight of Wingrove barring their way. They covered him with their rifles, and he threw up his right hand, palm outward, and continued walking towards them, alone

and unarmed. He watched their weapons, expecting at every instant to see them flash and to feel the bullets hitting him. But he went on.

“How!” he called out.

To his astonishment the Indians lowered their guns and offered to shake hands with him.

He did not refuse the offer. One of them gave him his gun in sign of surrender. He took it, and the other two also surrendered. He was standing with the three rifles in the crook of his arm when Sergeant Silk came up and spoke to them. But he could not make them understand, for they only shook their heads and muttered.

Silk looked into their faces, and at their clothing.

“Sioux?” he questioned.

“Um,” they answered.

Silk turned to the three scouts and ordered them to conduct the three into camp. Then he looked curiously into Wingrove’s face.

“That was plucky of you, Wingrove,” he said. “They are American Sioux—about the most desperate, bloodthirsty tribe in existence.

They'd have thought nothing of shooting you. They had covered you. You were absolutely helpless. Why did you do it? Eh? Why did you do it?"

Roger Wingrove drew a deep breath.

"I don't know," he stammered. "Perhaps I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't known that you were watching me. I couldn't turn back then."

"Which means," said Silk, "that you would rather die than that I should call you a coward?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Roger faltered.

Later in the evening of that same day Roger Wingrove was riding beside one of the sleighs when Sinclair called to him—

"I say, Wingrove, you're not snow-blind like I am, I wish you'd find the doctor somewhere and bring him along to O'Dowd here. He's wanted to do something for the poor chap's frost-bites. Look at the nose of him! It's turning green!"

Roger rode forward and then backward along the files; but he could not find the doctor. Some one said that they had seen him dropping to the rear. Roger asked

permission to go back and search for him.

The night was dark excepting for the fitful, rosy glow of the Aurora Borealis, but he could see to follow the back trail. He followed it for three miles before he found the doctor badly frozen in a deep drift, his horse exhausted.

Roger exchanged mounts and began to punch the doctor's head to keep him awake. The doctor then informed him that there was another man still farther back on the trail, and Roger set off to find him also, following his tracks far out from the trail of the expedition and discovering him at last wandering helplessly, lost and in delirium.

How Roger got the two men back to the expedition he never told. It was nearly midnight when he reached camp, and his face was white with the perspiration which had frozen on his skin.

That night the officers gave up their tent for the sick. Many were frost-bitten, and thirty of them were snow-blind.

When the expedition came in sight of the frozen Saskatchewan river, and made camp

for the night, the scouts were sent out and urged to be more than usually vigilant.

Green Grass returned after a long absence and reported cheerfully that the way was clear. There was no sign of the enemy, he declared.

But Sergeant Silk was suspicious of his cheerfulness, and he had already taken the precaution of secretly sending Little Panther in the same direction.

Little Panther brought information that an ambush had been prepared for the police at Batoche Crossing. The woods on either side of the trail were lined with rifle pits, and the whole of the enemy's force was in waiting, expecting the Red Patrol to pass under the muzzles of their guns somewhere about day-break.

Colonel Irvine struck camp at midnight, giving orders that every man was to ride with his finger on the trigger of his carbine, that not a word was to be spoken.

And so in the dead of night the long procession crept silently past the ambush by a different trail, and had crossed the ice long before sunrise to continue a forced march

through the sparkling frosted woodlands of the remaining fifty miles to Prince Albert.

Disappointed in their design of alluring the Red Patrol into the ambush that had been set for them, Poundmaker and Louis Riel turned towards Fort Carlton.

Colonel Irvine, with the pick of his reinforcements from Regina, hastened to intercept them. But Superintendent Crozier in command of D troop of the Mounted Police at Fort Carlton did not wait for the relief that was coming to him. Instead, he set out to meet the advancing rebels.

At Duck Lake, some eight miles south of the fort, Crozier's party fell into just such an ambush as Colonel Irvine had avoided.

The rebels had taken cover in a coulée, and when the Mounted Police and volunteers showed themselves they were met by a withering fire from the half-breeds and Indians.

Crozier got his seven-pounder gun into position, and the fight began. The first round was fired, and seven of the rebels fell. The gun was loaded again, but this time with the shell first and the powder afterwards, and the thing jammed and was thereafter useless.

The police fought from the cover of their sleighs drawn up across the road, the officers standing. But the position soon became desperate, and Crozier at last gave the order to retreat.

Hardly enough sleighs could be saved to carry back the wounded, and twelve of the Red Patrol were left dead in the drifts when the retreat began.

Very slowly the remnant of the little force dragged itself back to Carlton, arriving at the fort just as the relief column from Prince Albert swept in at the gates.

Sergeant Silk and Colonel Irvine stood watching them as they crawled in.

"It's no good, sir," said Silk. "We are only a posse of policemen, after all. We don't even know the way to load a seven-pounder gun, it seems. Perhaps the people at Ottawa will send us some military help when they hear of this."

"They will need to," responded the colonel, "if Canada is to be saved. Come, Silk, let us get them out of this. The fort must be abandoned. We must move the whole garrison into Prince Albert. But we

needn't leave the stores for the enemy. Set to work. Let everything that we can't take with us be destroyed."

All through the rest of that day the garrison was engaged in the work of destruction. Saddles were chopped to ribbons, valuable furs were burnt, provisions were soaked with petroleum; rifles were broken; and when the sleighs were loaded with the wounded and the refugees, the old stockade was set on fire and the night retreat on Prince Albert was begun.

As Sergeant Silk was about to mount, a girl bending over from a sleigh caught at his arm. She spoke to him, and he ran back into the flames, returning some moments afterwards to drop into her lap a kitten that he had saved.

"That's all right," he smiled.

CHAPTER XXVI

WINGROVE'S WOUND

IT was in the middle of the night that Roger Wingrove and Little Panther, glistening all over their bodies with hoar frost, and their horses caked with frozen sweat, rode into the silent, sleeping village of Prince Albert, bringing news of the disaster at Duck Lake.

Colonel Irvine had sent them in advance of the retreating column of police and refugees from Fort Carlton, and they had ridden for nine hours through the piercing cold without a rest.

They made their way at once to the detachment barracks, where they were received by Corporal Rushmere.

Roger told the story of Inspector Crozier's defeat while he was stabling his horse.

"The enemy are too strong for us, that's a certainty," he declared. "The fight was all over in twenty-five minutes, and twelve of D

troop were lying dead in the snowdrifts when Crozier gave the order to retreat. Two of them were scalped."

"Not by the breeds, though," said Rushmere.

"No, I suppose not. The breeds confined themselves to shooting, and by all accounts they're clever at it. The Red Patrol can't do much against them, facing them in small companies. We've got to concentrate; we're going to. It's the only way. Fort Carlton can't hold out, so the colonel has decided to abandon the post, smash the whole show to pieces, and transfer the garrison and the refugees here to Prince Albert."

"Wough!" muttered Little Panther, breathing upon his cramped fingers and stamping his ice-cold feet. "Bad medicine. No good. How you get grub, so many people all here one place?"

"Grub?" echoed Bunny Rushmere in dismay. "That's just what's puzzling me. We're crowded up here already with more people than the place was ever meant to accommodate. We shall have to go on siege rations, sure. If we're corralled by the

enemy, we're simply done for. There's no escape."

"I expect the Dominion Government will send relief before it comes anywhere near starvation point," suggested Roger in boyish confidence.

Bunny Rushmere was leading the way across the barrack yard.

"Relief?" he repeated. "Yes, if the Government could be made to realise that we stand in need of it—if they can be made to understand that the Mounted Police can't do the work of a standing army—they'd sure send relief, and it would come in the course of a month or two, when we're all dead. What's the good of relief when it's too late? We want it now—to-night. No relief column could come all the way from Ottawa, marching over a thousand hungry miles through trackless forest, and be here inside of a month."

"But they know that the Indians are on the warpath," urged Roger. "They've been told that we can't get along without help."

"Sure," acknowledged Rushmere, "but they can't have started yet, and we've got to do

without their help. We've got to look after ourselves unaided, and do the best we can. Come inside and have some warm grub, you two, and get yourselves thawed. It's twenty-five below zero to-night. B-r-r-r!"

Roger and Little Panther kept their distance from the stove that glowed red-hot at the end of the barrack-room. They carried snow in their hands and rubbed their faces with it.

Their supper was prepared for them by White Plume. She had been acting as nurse to the frost-bitten, snow-blind members of the force whom she had accompanied on the long march from Regina.

While they ate, Corporal Rushmere summoned the officers of the garrison, who gathered round the stove to discuss the situation.

It was agreed that the enemy, exulting over their victory at Duck Lake, would probably hasten to follow it up with further attempts at conquest.

Finding that Fort Carlton had been abandoned, they would naturally turn their attention to Prince Albert, and the village was not fortified against them. With their overwhelm-

ing numbers and skilled sharpshooters they would have no great difficulty in attaining their object.

The half-breeds were, all of them, trained hunters accustomed to the use of their repeating rifles: their Indian allies were fighters by nature, reckless in courage, cunning in taking cover and in crawling up to their prey.

The defenders, on the other hand, were for the most part peaceful farmers who had never been under fire, and who hardly knew one end of a gun from the other, depending wholly upon the protection and help of a handful of policemen.

The village itself was a mere collection of log shacks, without stockades. The only brick buildings of strength were the Presbyterian church and manse. Even the police barracks and the Hudson's Bay Company's post were little better than sheds of timber and mud.

"Look at it how you will," said Bunny Rushmere, "we're in a jolly tight corner. What's to be done? We can't hang around waiting for the colonel to come and give us his advice. And he's bringing along the whole

bunch of the refugees from Carlton, to make matters worse."

"Why can't we turn the church into a kind of fortress?" Roger Wingrove suggested. "It would hold all the women and children, wouldn't it?"

"Not a bad idea," smiled one of the officers, "but I'm afraid the minister would discover some obstacle."

"Let him," said Corporal Rushmere. "If he objects, tell him to go and soak his head."

In the midst of the discussion, the minister himself entered, with an old shot-gun showing among the folds of his enormous fur overcoat. He was presently followed by the factor of the Hudson's Bay post, the village doctor, the schoolmaster, and two or three of the prominent merchants, all bustling in half asleep, but ready to suggest a hundred wild, unpractical schemes of defence. The alarm had spread throughout the village, and it was believed that the Redskins were already creeping up across the snow to begin the terrible work of massacre and pillage.

"There's only one thing to do, boys," declared the minister, anxious above all things

for the safety of his parishioners and their homeless guests. "We must convert the church into a fort of refuge, where the women and children will be safe. And if you think it is not strong enough to withstand an assault, then there is timber in plenty in the village, and we can build a stockade round both the church and the manse."

The proposal was too good to be ignored, and it was at once acted upon.

All the able-bodied men were mustered and set to work, under the direction of the police, some to carry provisions and furniture into the church, others to haul timber from the wood-stacks in the back-yards with which to erect palisades, and some to round up all the horses, cattle and poultry.

Within ten hours the church and manse were transformed into a formidable citadel, enclosed in a stout stockade, pierced with loopholes, and by noon the work was finished; the women and children, the sick and the infirm were under secure shelter.

Over three hundred women, with their children, thronged the church. The little building was made to serve as mess-house, women's

quarters, nursery, hospital, main guard and powder magazine. Rations were served from the platform of the pulpit, where a heap of rifles had been stacked.

In the space under the floor some thirty barrels of gunpowder were stored, ready to be touched off in the event of the enemy making a breach in the stockade.

Within the palisades there was a confusion of piled-up merchandise—bales of valuable furs for the Eastern markets, cases of sugar, tea, tobacco, and other commodities intended for the distant outposts, stacks of forage, barrels of oil, sacks of flour and tins of preserved meat, all helping to give the place the appearance of a general store.

The garrison from Fort Carlton with the refugees had entered Prince Albert at sundown to find the village thus transformed. The police made camp in the detachment barracks outside the stockade. Utterly exhausted by seventy hours on duty, they saw to the comfort of their horses and then went to sleep where they dropped.

But even then there was no rest for them. They had hardly closed their eyes when they

were disturbed by a wild commotion in the church close by. Stoves had been lighted, doors and windows were shut to keep out the cold. In the confined space of thirty feet by forty the air became hot and oppressive to suffocation. One of the women had fainted, and some one had shoved a bayonet through a window for ventilation.

The smashing of glass filled the nervous, excited people with terror, which became a panic when a volunteer, handling a rifle, pulled the trigger and bored a hole in the roof.

Then a man rushed in at the door howling—
“To arms! They’re coming!”

The alarm bell rang out. There was a frantic tumult of cries and screams.

Sergeant Silk and two or three of his comrades flung on their buffalo overcoats and hurried out from the barracks to inquire into the reason of the commotion, to stop the ringing of the bell, and to restore confidence and calm with the assurance that the Indians were encamped many miles away.

“Don’t you make no error ’bout that, Sergeant,” declared the man who had rushed in calling the refugees to arms. “You don’t

know. They're comin' right now—crowds of 'em. I've seen 'em. You haven't: you've been asleep, the whole pack of you, 'stead of mountin' guard and keepin' watch. You're half asleep even now!"

"Exactly," Sergeant Silk admitted. "I never was more sleepy in my life. I could go to sleep on the edge of a knife. But for all that, I'm willing to keep awake and do my duty if there's need. What makes you say the enemy are coming?"

"I've seen 'em," the man declared, "seen 'em an' heard 'em. I been along to my shack ter fetch away my pile of savings from under the floor." He held up a stocking, bulging and jingling with the coins that were in it. "And as I were comin' round, back of the schools, I looks eastward to the hills, and there I sees a whole band of Redskins crawlin' across the ridge, like ants over sugar."

"That's all right, Bub," said Silk, turning aside; "go and hide your head in your blanket while I slip out and have a spy round."

Roger Wingrove overheard his spoken resolve.

"Do you mean that you're going to ride

out to look at those ants, Sergeant?" he questioned, pulling on his fur mittens.

"Why, cert'nly," Silk answered wearily, "there may be some truth in what the fellow says. It's best to make sure."

"Of course," agreed Wingrove, "but there's no need for you to go prowling around in the cold when you're half dead for want of sleep. I have had six hours' rest. Go back to your bunk and get a good doss. You can trust me to go scouting round, can't you?"

"If you can find a bronc' that isn't dead tired," returned Silk, yielding for once to his exhaustion, "you can at least ride round and see that the sentries are all at their posts."

Roger saw the sergeant turn in at the barrack yard and then went to the stables, saddled a fresh troop-horse, and rode out to the eastward of the village.

Pickets had been posted in a cordon round the abandoned and empty shacks. The first one he came to was a young cowboy who was occupied in trying to keep himself warm rather than watching. The second one was asleep under a haystack; the third station was deserted.

Wingrove rode on, and his horse shied as he came to something lying very still in the snow. He dismounted, believing that the man was only asleep, but on touching him found that he was stiff and cold and lifeless.

At first it seemed that he had been frozen to death at his post. But presently, by the fitful, flickering light of the Aurora Borealis, Wingrove saw that the snow where he lay was darkly stained with blood. Looking closer, he made the further, more gruesome discovery that the man had been scalped.

There was no gun beside him. It was easy to see what had happened. Round about were the deep confused tracks of the dead picket's boots where he had paced to and fro, and amongst them, crushing them here and there, were the marks of a pair of Indian moccasins. One of the enemy's scouts, no doubt discovered and challenged, had silenced the sentry's cry of alarm and gone off with his gun.

Roger followed the Indian's retreating tracks until they ended among the hoof-prints of a horse.

The snow was deep, and the rosy light of the Aurora was not strong enough to allow him

to examine the impressions; but in one place where the snow had been swept by the wind the marks were more distinct, and it occurred to him that this was not the first time that he had followed the same tracks.

He led his horse back to the dead man. Standing over him, wondering what to do, he listened to a curious rasping sound that came to him from the eastward. He heard the yapping of a dog, the snorting of a horse, the crack of a whip, and a man's voice calling out—

“Mush! Mush!”

Sound travels a long distance over the snow, and these sounds, with others that followed them, told him plainly that beyond the rise of the nearest hill there was a train of dog-sleighs and horses coming nearer and nearer, very slowly.

He remounted and rode towards the hillock, stopping now and again to listen.

“Oh, well,” he heard a voice speaking very clearly in broken English, “when we ’ave arrive, *mon cher* ’Arvey, you will zen agree it was better we mek ze beeg spurt for ze hend. Why not?”

Wingrove knew then that it was not a band of hostile Indians, but a party of refugees from some outlying ranch.

He rode forward to meet them as they topped the rise. There was a stretch of level snow between him and the intervening hillock. Halfway across it he became aware that he was not alone.

He drew rein and heard the laboured breathing of a horse, the crunching of hoofs in the frozen snow.

Turning in his saddle, he glanced back over his shoulder in time to see the dim, shadowy form of a horseman move into the darkness behind a clump of bushes.

It was only a momentary glimpse, but that glimpse confirmed what he had already guessed: that the horseman dogging him was an Indian scout, the same scout who had attacked and killed the sentry, the same scout whom he himself had dogged three times, and three times captured—his enemy Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water. He had turned traitor, and gone back to the rebels.

Roger urged his broncho forward to the bushes behind which the scout had dis-

appeared. He knew that it was his duty to capture Green Grass, if not even to shoot him at sight.

He rode forward cautiously, searching with busy eyes for a movement in the bushes which should tell him where to aim. He heard the dog-sleighs and horses, and the voices of men as the refugees came down the slope behind him; but in front of him there was no sound or movement that he could detect.

He went on yet farther, holding his carbine ready.

Suddenly a bush moved, and from the midst of it there came a flash. His horse reared as the report followed. But it was Roger Wingrove himself that was struck. He felt a sharp stinging pain in his right shoulder. His fingers relaxed their grip of his gun, and the weapon fell to the ground. With his left hand he gathered the bridle rein, but the horse still reared and kicked, while from beyond the bushes came the sound of galloping hoofs as Green Grass rode away.

It was impossible to follow in pursuit.

Quieting the broncho at last, Roger dismounted to pick up his fallen gun. As he

stooped, a sickly feeling came over him, his brain reeled and he stumbled, dropped on his knees, tried to rise again, and then fell with his burning face in the snow.

Thus he lay until a hand was thrust under his head and he was lifted.

"Say, Pierre, it's one of the Red Patrol," said a boyish voice which he seemed to recognise.

"*Parbleu*, yes," returned Pierre Adieu. "'E 'ave been shot by ze peeg of a Hindian who escape there. It ees good luck we was near. We tek 'im in sled, *hein?*"

A dog-sleigh was brought, and Roger Wingrove was lifted into it by the side of a woman and covered with warm furs.

"Harvey!" cried the woman, as the sleigh was about to start, "d'you know who 'tis? Why, it's young Mr. Wingrove that was along at our ranch with Sergeant Silk!"

"Then you are Mrs. Gildersley," Roger raised himself to say; "I thought you had gone to Fort Battleford."

What Amelia Gildersley answered, he did not hear. He only heard Pierre Adieu shouting to the dog team to "Mush! mush!" He

felt the sleigh gliding smoothly on its runners over the snow, and knew nothing more until he opened his eyes to find Sergeant Silk bending over him in the light of a lamp in the barrack-room.

"Keep still; don't move," said Silk, "I'm tying up an artery. Give him another sniff of that sponge, Bunny."

"It was Green Grass that did it," murmured Roger, as he fell again into unconsciousness. "Better me than you, though, Sergeant. Better me than you."

"There, that's all right," were the next words that he heard, when he recovered from the chloroform to find his shoulder bandaged. "And the man who wakens me will know what it means to see me angry."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAPTURE OF SERGEANT SILK

DURING the six weeks that followed, Roger saw no more of Sergeant Silk. He heard that he had gone off on the Rattlesnake Patrol; he heard that he had been captured by Indians; then some one spoke of his being in Battleford.

News came into Prince Albert very slowly, brought by scouts. Often it was news of raids and massacres. The enemy had spread themselves over the whole of the territories, and had committed a terrible massacre at Frog Lake.

Inspector Dickens and his detachment of the Mounted Police had been forced to abandon Fort Pitt. Battleford was threatened. With Prince Albert it was the only refuge and stronghold left in central Saskatchewan.

But the tide was beginning to turn. In the south, the cowboys and police had secured the stock ranges and all the prairie province of

Alberta by winning the good-will of the great Blackfoot nation. They had marched to the relief of Battleford and had engaged and beaten the Crees.

In the meantime, reports of the outrages in the north-west had reached Ottawa, and the Dominion Government had acted with great promptitude. An expedition of five thousand men was dispatched from eastern Canada. Already they were marching through the frozen fastnesses of the northern forest, coming nearer and nearer.

One day Roger Wingrove awoke after a refreshing sleep and heard men talking.

"A jolly good thing for you and for us that that Indian girl was there to help you to escape," Bunny Rushmere was saying, "and I bet you didn't leave her behind. You got her free as well?"

"Why, cert'nly."

At those familiar words Roger turned round to see Sergeant Silk, looking exceedingly thin and pale and worn, but still with the old alert brightness in his keen blue eyes. Silk heard him move.

"By the way, Bunny," he said, "did you

give Wingrove that letter that came for him just before I went off? What? No? Oh, you senseless caribou! You double distilled siwash! Why, it was from home—from England—black-edged, too! I dare say it was important. Where is it? Give it him right now!”

While Roger was reading the letter, the other men went out to parade, leaving Silk alone.

“I hope it’s not bad news, Roger,” said Silk, addressing him for the first time by this name.

Roger was silent for some moments.

“It’s to tell me that my uncle, Sir Lancelot, is ‘dead,’” he said presently. “I’m awfully sorry. He was a ripping nice chap.” Then after a long pause, he added: “My father’s the baronet, now; and he’ll come in for heaps and heaps of money, and no end of property. Though that’s not much use, seeing that he got turned out of the Army for being a coward.”

“My boy,” said Silk, “I don’t believe your father was any more a coward than you are. And certainly you’re not one, or you wouldn’t

be here nursing that lame arm. I'm glad to see it's better—very glad. You'll be in the saddle again inside of a week, the doctor says."

"Yes," nodded Roger, "and he also says that the man who took out the bullet and fixed up the broken artery ought to have been a surgeon, and couldn't have been asleep when he did it, as the fellows told him you were."

Sergeant Silk took out his pipe and began to load it.

"I guess you'll be chucking the Red Patrol and going home, now that you're heir to a baronetcy and all that wealth," he said reflectively. "What?"

"That's what they urge me to do," returned Roger, "but of course I shall do nothing of the sort. I want to see the end of this rebellion business, for one thing. I'm not going to quit before you're through with it. And—well, there's another thing that would keep me, if nothing else did."

"What's that?" asked Silk.

Roger did not answer, and the sergeant repeated his question.

"I don't see what should keep you, if you

want to quit. The game isn't worth a whole lot compared with living in luxury at home in England."

"But I don't want any luxury," protested Wingrove. "I don't want to be a baronet or to have wealth. There's something that I value far more. And I can only get it by sticking out here. Some day, perhaps, I may explain. That is, if it ever comes off. But not now, Sergeant; not now."

Sergeant Silk stood up and strode to the stove to get a light.

"That's all right," he said. "Don't tell me now. Wait till it comes off."

He knew very well what the boy was getting at, although Wingrove did not suspect that he knew.

It was clear to Silk that Roger had fixed his mind upon one thing, one ambition, to the exclusion of all else. He wanted to live down his father's disgrace and prove by some act that he was not himself a coward.

Silk thought that the ambition was already achieved. Wingrove had shown on many occasions that he was not deterred from doing his duty by feelings of timidity or cowardice.

What Silk did not know was the fact that Wingrove's ambition depended upon himself, and that it could not be fully achieved until he, Sergeant Silk, should openly and spontaneously commend him for a signal act of bravery.

Neither Silk nor Wingrove imagined how soon and in what thrilling circumstances that act of bravery was to be performed.

It came about very simply, very unexpectedly.

Three days after Sergeant Silk's return to Prince Albert, scouts began to come in from their long patrols.

The news was confirmed that Fort Battleford had been relieved by the cowboys and a detachment of the Mounted Police, and that the defeated Cree Indians were retreating to Batoche to join the main army of the rebels.

It was reported that the Canadian troops, led by Major-General Middleton, had already reached Fish Creek, less than a day's march from Batoche, and that Middleton had been checked by the insurgents concealed in rifle-pits ingeniously constructed and placed in a deep ravine.

Another report was to the effect that the rebels under Louis Riel and Poundmaker had gone out in force from Batoche to meet the Canadians in open battle, and that the Canadians had been completely routed.

Neither report was confirmed, and Colonel Irvine was at the end of his resources. If relief did not come immediately Prince Albert must fall.

In the difficulty, Sergeant Silk volunteered to ride south and learn the truth. But he might have to steal into the enemy's camp, and he could not go alone.

Roger Wingrove volunteered to accompany him. Silk demurred, but Colonel Irvine accepted the offer. He could not spare one of his older men.

Silk wished for a half-breed scout, as well as an Indian, who could go amongst the rebels without being suspected as spies. He chose Little Panther and Pierre Adieu, and the four of them rode off.

They reached the outskirts of Batoche without accident. Silk disguised himself as a trapper, and taking Pierre with him, left

Wingrove and Little Panther to wait in hiding in the shelter of a bluff of pines.

They waited until evening had darkened into night. They waited until midnight, and there was no sign of a return.

Roger Wingrove became desperately anxious. But he dared not move away. Then at last they heard footsteps. Pierre Adieu ran up to them. His face was bleeding, his clothes were tattered. He pointed backward.

"Zey 'ave tek 'im," he panted, "ze Hindians 'ave capture 'im—Sergeant Seelk. Zey mek torture 'im. Oh, it ees terrible—terrible!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE TEST OF COURAGE

"CAPTURED?" repeated Roger Wingrove in consternation. He had not thought it possible that any harm could come to Sergeant Silk.

"*Sapristi*, yes," declared Pierre Adieu, with his hand to his wounded cheek. "It ees bad business. Ze Hindians will sure torture 'im. It ees ze hend. And 'im so brave—ze mos' brave man in ze whole of Canada!"

Wingrove stared at the half-breed accusingly.

"And you who went with him—why are you here?" he cried. "Couldn't you do anything? Couldn't you rescue him? You had your gun. Why didn't you shoot down the brutes that took him?"

"But what would you, *m'sieu?*" returned Pierre. "I am 'elpless. And I also, I who tell you of such calamity, I was ver' near

capture also, only, you see, I 'ave not ze sam' magnifique courage for go so far as Sergean' Seelk. 'E was too daring, too venturesome. For once it seem 'e tek too much ze risk; 'e go too near ze henemy, leaving me be'ind. Well, then, I see ze scout—many scout leap out ze ground. Zey seize 'im, zey drag 'im away. For myself, I am then much perplex. I know not what I shall do. It ees not possible I 'elp him, not at all. Nevertheless, it is necessaire I obey 'im. I run back 'ere, then, as 'e tell me, to give into your 'ands ze dispatch."

Pierre stooped and with difficulty extracted from within the ankle of his moccasin a crushed-up slip of paper.

"*Voilà!*" he said, handing it to Roger Wingrove. "You read what 'e 'ave written. Afterwards, you destroy ze paper."

Wingrove went down on his knees beside a shielding cleft of rock and took out a box of matches. By the light which Pierre held he opened the crumpled piece of paper and read the message which Sergeant Silk had hurriedly written before going off to penetrate farther into the enemy's lines. The message was addressed to Colonel Irvine, and brief though

it was Wingrove recognised the importance of the information it contained.

“General Middleton, with detachment of Canadian troops, approximate number not yet ascertained, met with slight repulse at Fish Creek. Is now advancing on Batoche. Reinforcements urgently needed. Rebels in full strength under Riel and Hairy Bear command approaches to Batoche Crossing, with two miles of rifle pits. A force of N.W.M.P. approaching by way of poplar bluffs south of village could attack enemy’s rear and cut off retreat.—SILK.”

Crushing up the paper into a small ball, while Pierre extinguished the light, Wingrove stood up.

“He seems to have learnt a precious lot in very little time,” he ruminated, as he strode to where Little Panther waited with the four horses. “This must go to Colonel Irvine,” he said to the Indian. “You will take it. I stay here with Pierre. Let nothing delay you. Ride quickly—ride like the wind.”

Little Panther concealed the pellet of paper securely within one of the thick plaits of his long hair, shook hands with Wingrove, leapt

into the saddle, and rode cautiously away, disappearing like a silent shadow into the dark forest glades.

"*Eh, bien,*" said Pierre, "and we—you and I—*m'sieu*. What we do? Is it that we return to ze barrack, leave ze brave Sergeant' Seelk be'ind?"

Wingrove glanced at him in the darkness.

"I don't know," he answered absently. "I must think. You say that he was taken into the village. Is there any chance of our getting at him?"

Pierre shook his head.

"Impossible," he answered decisively. "Impossible, absolutely. Suppose we mek ze attempt, we do no good—no good at all. I tell you, *m'sieu*, it ees not so easy for mek you'self invisible when you 'ave a Hindian scout in hambush be'ind every blade of grass."

"But you can lead me to the spot where Sergeant Silk and you parted company?" pursued Wingrove.

"Assuredly," said Pierre.

"Very well; then we leave the three ponies hobbled here, and as soon as you have shown me the way, you will come back and wait."

"*Parbleu!*" muttered Pierre in surprise. "You follow 'im, then, *hein?* You 'ave ze beeg intention to go right into ze henemy's camp? *Tiens!* In such case I wait ver' long tam."

"You mean that I shall not come back, I suppose," said Wingrove.

Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"It ees beeg risk," he declared.

"That is why I am taking it," Wingrove said grimly.

He went up to Sergeant Silk's broncho. Without knowing exactly why he did so, he took Silk's military overcoat from across the saddle and covered himself with it in place of the trapper's capote that he had been wearing. He also took Silk's regimental busby, which he exchanged for his trapper's fur cap.

Perhaps he had the idea that if Silk should chance to see him he would know him better in the uniform than in a disguise which made him look like hundreds of other men about the camp. Perhaps, too, he supposed that Silk's one mistake had been in going into the enemy's lines in disguise.

The Indians and Metis might have no compunction in torturing an ordinary man whom they had caught in the act of spying; but the breeds at all events would think twice before doing physical injury to a member of the Mounted Police.

Pierre looked at him in the darkness.

"*Parbleu!*" he exclaimed. "Assuredly *m'sieu* might ver' well pass 'imself off for ze veritable Sergeant' Seelk!"

"Come!" ordered Wingrove, "the ponies will be safe here until you come back. Bring your rifle. You may need it. Go on in front."

Pierre took his direction by the stars and led the way through the thickly-growing pine trees, treading very softly, making hardly a sound. Wingrove followed in his footsteps about three paces in the rear. They went on and on until they came within sight of the great Saskatchewan river, flowing swiftly between steep banks. They climbed a hill, and as they approached its uppermost ridge, Pierre went more slowly, allowing Roger to come up to him.

"Softly!" he cautioned in a whisper, crouching.

He crept onward on knees and elbows for a few yards, and then lay flat and pointed down into the valley to the flickering fires of the enemy's encampment and the village.

Roger Wingrove, lying beside him, could dimly make out the various landmarks. He saw the wide river with its abrupt bend at Batoche Crossing. Within the angle of the bend were the rebels' rifle pits where Indians were moving about with lighted torches, apparently making preparations for their ambush.

Beyond the trenches was the Indian camp with its lines of black cone-shaped wigwams, half-hidden by an intervening stretch of scattered bush. He could understand, as Sergeant Silk had understood, how the Canadian troops advancing from Fish Creek and crossing by the ford would be met by a long line of rifle fire from hidden trenches, and how important it was that General Middleton should be warned of the ambush that awaited him.

He could also see the strategical value of Silk's suggestion that a force of the Mounted Police should be sent to make an attack from a point to the southward of the village. This

latter suggestion would no doubt be adopted if Little Panther should succeed in reaching Prince Albert in time.

As for warning General Middleton, Wingrove resolved that, if presently he failed in finding Sergeant Silk, he would himself ride in hot haste to meet the approaching Canadians and tell them of their danger.

Wondering how Silk had got to know about the repulse at Fish Creek, he questioned Pierre Adieu.

Pierre then informed him that while he and the sergeant were still together, they had run up against one of General Middleton's scouts spying upon the insurgents' position. The scout had given Silk particulars of the fight at Fish Creek, and now, having discovered the rifle pits here at Batoche Crossing, and the disposition of the encampment, he was already starting off to ride back to the command with his report.

"It ees clear, then, that we shall do no good suppose we stay 'ere," added Pierre. "We get no more of useful information: we only run ze beeg risk to get caught. We go back, then. Why not?"

Wingrove paid no regard to the proposal. He had no intention of turning back.

"Show me the place where Sergeant Silk and you parted company," he urged.

Pierre strode onward down the slope of the wooded hill and then along the river bank towards the rebels' encampment. When they came within sight of the enemy's cordon of pickets, he stopped abruptly.

"You see?" he whispered. "It ees impossible we get any nearer."

Then glancing round at the various remembered landmarks—the lie of the river, the group of wigwams, the village church and log cabins—he went aside, searching along the ground until he came into the middle of a thick bluff of birch trees, when he stooped and drew out a gun from amongst the herbage.

"*Voilà, m'sieu,*" he said. "You see, it ees ze gun of Sergean' Seelk, which 'e leave 'ere. Since 'e 'ave not come back for it, you may sure believe 'e 'ave not escape."

"Tell me what happened when he left you," Roger asked.

"In ze first place," explained Pierre, "'e commence write ze dispatch which I 'ide in

my moccasin to give to you suppose 'e nevaire come back. Afterwards 'e go crawl along ze grass lak a snake. I watch 'im. I tell myself it is all right, 'e is ze bes' scout of the Red Patrol. Nobody will catch 'im. 'E goes, then, and I 'ave no fear. Presently 'e disappears. I 'ear nothing, I see nothing of 'im for long, long tam, until I am much fatigue. Then I am terribly alarm. I see ze picket is being changed. It ees bad business. I see one, two, three scout come along. They 'ide be'ind ze saskatoon bush, over there.

"*Sapristi!* it ees ver' awkward, that, suppose 'e come back now ze sam' way 'e went. I ask myself 'ow I shall warn 'im in such event. I wait, then, lying ver' still, ver' quiet, watching, watching. *Alors*, before I am aware I see ze brave sergean' crawling back. It ees all right. But *hélas!* ze three Hindian scout also they 'ave seen 'im. *Pouf!* They 'ave spring upon 'im, 'e is capture!"

"And you didn't shoot?" questioned Wingrove. "You had two rifles beside you. You're a good shot. Why didn't you fire?"

"Wait, *m'sieu*," returned Pierre. "Naturally I fire. I fire one shot. It was beeg risk;

but what would you do? I miss. 'Ow shall I forgive myself? It only mek matters worse, I 'ave reveal my 'iding-place. Immediately I am seen, pursued, by two other scout who leap up from ze ground quite close. You may believe I run queek dat tam. They shoot at me. A bullet seem to 'it me; nevertheless I go on. I think of ze piece of paper in my moccasin, you un'erstand."

"That will do," Roger Wingrove interrupted. "Keep quiet, keep still."

He had thrust his hand into the pocket of his borrowed overcoat and drawn out some papers and a notebook. He opened the notebook, and in the darkness scribbled some words on one of the blank pages, which he tore out and folded very small.

"Pierre is waiting in the place where you left him. Your report has gone to its destination."

He did not know as yet for what purpose he had written his message, or by what possible means he could hope to convey it into Sergeant Silk's hands. For all that he could tell, Silk might already be dead, and it seemed futile in

any case to send him a message so obviously unimportant. Nevertheless Wingrove carefully guarded it.

"Listen," he whispered, turning to Pierre, "I am going to try to find him. You will stop here on this spot. Stop until sunrise, and if by that time neither of us turns up——"

He broke off. Not until this moment, when he was ready to start upon his perilous quest, had he seriously considered the danger which he intended to face; not until this moment had he realised the possibility that he might never return. The only thing that had occupied his thoughts was the certainty that Sergeant Silk, his friend, was a prisoner in the enemy's camp, arrested as a spy, and that even though he should fail in his endeavour to reach him, it was still his highest duty to make the attempt.

"And if neither of us turns up," he added resolutely, "then you will go back to the horses and take them to barracks."

"*Eh, bien,*" nodded Pierre, with full understanding. "You 'ave resolve then to tek ze beeg reesk? Ver' good. Why not? After all, it ees what Sergean' Seelk would do for you, for me even, or for any one else. *M'sieu*, I

wish you ze good luck, and—" he put out his hand, "*au revoir*."

"So long," Roger laughed nervously. He felt that at last his opportunity had come to prove beyond all doubt that he was not a coward.

His heart was beating furiously, he was trembling in every limb; but it was not with fear. He knew that even now he might if he chose turn back and that there would be no blame to him. No one had commanded him to do this thing. It was no part of his military duty to do it: he was taking the risk and facing the forlorn hope entirely upon his own responsibility. But not for an instant did he hesitate. He went forward, walking boldly upright, as if he had no reason to fear arrest. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry that as he came out from the darkness of the woodland the moon broke through the thick black clouds which had drifted over it during the past hour. The brighter light enabled him to see his way more clearly, but at the same time it made him more liable to be seen by the sharply watchful eyes of the enemy's outposts.

CHAPTER XXIX

ROGER WINGROVE'S ACHIEVEMENT.

ROGER began to understand the wisdom of Sergeant Silk in going in disguise. The uniform of the Mounted Police was well known by every Indian and half-breed in the rebels' camp, and he could hardly hope to escape detection if he should chance to be seen.

Between him and the village was an expanse of open ground which he did not dare to cross as Silk seemed to have done. Instead, he made a wide *détour*, keeping within the shadows of the scrub on the river bank, passing quickly from bush to bush, pausing to watch and to listen.

He aimed at working his way round to the north of the village, whence he could cut across to the Indians' lines. In this he succeeded, coming at length to a gap in the bank through which he could survey the whole of the enemy's position.

The village now lay to his right. To his left was the river, sweeping round in an abrupt bend to the shallows of Batoche Crossing and a dense forest of pines. Directly in front of him was the stretch of undulating ground where the insurgents had dug their rifle pits, and beyond it were the lodges of the Redskins.

Among the log cabins of the village, where the women and children slept, all was dark and quiet. It was only in the Indian camp that there were signs of life and movement. The voices of men came to him.

One voice was very near. It evidently was that of a half-breed on picket duty. He was singing softly one of the old Canadian songs.

Through the bush behind which he had taken cover Roger could see the singer with his gun over his shoulder. Presently a second man appeared, striding up to the first, asking him in French for a light. The two stood together lighting cigarettes, smoking and chatting.

Roger glided out from his bush and went in the direction from which the second scout had approached. The way was clear. He went forward quickly, silently, and gained the shelter of a hollow between two clumps of bush. He

knew that he had passed through the cordon of pickets and he could see that the rough ground in front of him would give him ample cover.

Once he tripped and fell into a trench, but crawled out and went on again until he came into the very midst of the encampment, where he hid himself in a rifle pit and watched.

From his place of concealment he could see two large tents with sentinels in front of them. Between them a large fire burnt, and beyond the fire several Indians stood on guard amongst the pine trees.

Presently, while he watched, the door flap of one of the large tents was thrown open. A young brave strode out and went round to the back, giving some order to the guards.

Roger could see into the tent. By the light of its hanging lamp he saw a company of warriors and half-breeds. He recognised the chief Poundmaker, who sat at a table beside a man with a red beard. The red-bearded man was none other than Louis Riel. They all appeared to be waiting for something, and their eyes were turned to the doorway.

Roger raised himself to his elbows. There was a commotion among the guards at the rear



STANDING BETWEEN THE GUARDS, HIS HEAD HIGH AND HIS
TWO HANDS TIED BEHIND HIM, WAS SERGEANT SILK.

of the lodge. Two of them marched forward, pulling each at the end of a rope. As they passed the fire they separated, and a man taller than themselves stepped in between them, looking proudly in front of him, with his head held high and his broad shoulders thrown back, his hands behind him tied with the rope.

At sight of him, Roger Wingrove's heart leapt into his mouth. It was Sergeant Silk.

In a moment they had disappeared into the tent and the door-flap was closed.

"Thank God, he's still alive!" murmured Roger. "They're going to search him and try to pump information out of him. But they won't get much. They won't get much."

He rose to his feet, climbing out of the pit, and reckless of the danger of being seen, crossed the moonlit grass towards the shadowed side of the tent, in the hope of getting near enough to overhear what was going on. As he went he drew his written message from an inner pocket, and shoved it for safety into his mouth, thinking that by some fortunate chance he might be able to slip it into Silk's hand as he came out.

There were many Indians and half-breeds

loitering about the tents, but they did not appear to observe him as he stole nearer. He saw to his annoyance that some now stood at the very place in which he had planned to conceal himself, and that to avoid them he would have to pass in front of the tent.

He did not hesitate. Turning slightly, he made straight for the fire, drooping his head to keep his face in shadow. If the passage were still free he would quickly hide himself in the darkness at the rear.

He had crossed in front of the tent and was about to dart past the firelight, when suddenly he drew back, tripped on one of the pegs, and fell into the outstretched arms of an Indian.

Almost before he fell he had seen the Indian's face and recognised it. He struggled to free himself, but Green Grass was not alone, and in spite of his struggling Roger was surrounded, seized, and dragged off into the darkness.

In his fall he had dropped the slip of paper from his mouth. A few moments afterwards, it was found by Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water, who had been summoned into the tent.

The scout took it with him and handed it to Louis Riel, intimating that it must have been dropped by the prisoner who was now being searched and interrogated.

Louis Riel read what was written and, not understanding its meaning, handed the paper to Sergeant Silk, asking him for an explanation.

Silk saw that the paper looked surprisingly like a page torn out of his own notebook. His countenance did not change as he read the written words: "*Pierre is waiting in the place where you left him. Your report has gone to its destination.*"

"It is not mine," he answered promptly. "I have never seen it before. Look, it is wet with dew. It has been lying on the grass all night." He said nothing of the teeth-marks on the paper.

"True," nodded Riel, "I had noticed that it was wet." He was fingering Silk's revolver. "This is an unusually good weapon to be in the possession of a poor trapper," he remarked. "Where did you get it?"

Silk shrugged his shoulders. He was acting up to the character he had assumed.

"It was given to me by a friend," he answered glibly. "I believe it was once the property of an officer in the Mounted Police."

Louis Riel scratched his red beard in perplexity. He had examined the prisoner, questioned and cross-questioned him, had had him searched, but nothing incriminating had been discovered. And yet he had been caught within the picket lines and seemed in spite of all evidence in his favour to be a spy.

Poundmaker turned to Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water.

"You do not know this man?" he interrogated. "He is a stranger to you?"

Sergeant Silk was perfectly well aware that the scout had swiftly penetrated his disguise and could with a word bring about his death, but for some reason unknown to him the scout shook his head and answered—

"Green Grass will not say. He is not sure. He only knows that he is a paleface spy."

"He is a paleface spy," repeated Poundmaker, "and my medicine tells me that he must be shot dead."

"He will live until sunrise," added Louis

Riel. "He will then be shot. Take him away."

The condemned prisoner was removed. When he had gone out, Louis Riel spoke to Green Grass through an interpreter.

"Did you not say that the spy who had been caught was the great Sergeant Silk?" he asked. "How came you to make such a mistake? There is not one of our enemies whom I should rather put a bullet into than this Silk, who has done so much against us."

It was then that Green-Grass-Growing-In-the-Water revealed his subtlety. It was little to him whether the man who had just gone out was executed or set free. He owed him no grudge. But there was another against whom he cherished a bitter vengeance, and he had discovered a way by which that vengeance might be fulfilled.

"Green Grass spoke true," he answered cunningly. "Wait."

He went out and presently returned, bringing in Roger Wingrove.

Roger strode up to the table with a calmness that surprised himself. He knew that he could not escape. But if he were to be condemned,

to death he would at least have the satisfaction of dying in company with Sergeant Silk, who would see him and know that he was not a coward.

His police uniform was instantly recognised by his judges.

"Not even disguised!" exclaimed Louis Riel. And pointing to the three chevron stripes on the prisoner's sleeve he added: "A sergeant, too! Let him be searched."

"There is no need," intimated Green Grass. "He is the great Sergeant Silk."

Roger stared at the scout in blank astonishment. What did the man mean? Had not Sergeant Silk been recognised? Had his disguise been so successful that even Green Grass did not know him?

Then Roger seemed to understand. Green Grass was adopting this cunning trick in order to be certain of having his revenge.

But, was it possible that Silk had been acquitted? Roger determined to let things take their course. It would be useless for him to say anything in his own defence. The evidence was all against him. The papers in his borrowed overcoat, the stripes on his sleeve, his

red tunic with its regimental buttons proclaimed him an officer of the Red Patrol. And he had been caught spying. No, there was no possibility of escape.

But Silk? What of Silk?

He glanced down on the table and saw there his own written message to Silk. Had Silk seen it? he wondered.

Green Grass held to his declaration. Poundmaker had seen this same policeman at Gildersley's. Louis Riel had not a shadow of doubt of his victim's identity, and there was a tone of triumph in his voice when after a few formalities he passed his sentence.

"He shall be shot," he said. "He shall be shot at the break of day. Let him be well guarded."

Green - Grass - Growing - In - the - Water chuckled, then turned to Riel.

"Me shoot him," he said. "Me shoot straight."

All through the rest of that night Roger Wingrove writhed in the ropes that bound him. He did not try to sleep. For a time he thought of all that he was sacrificing—position, wealth, happiness, even honour perhaps. And then in

his awful loneliness there came unbidden into his memory the haunting words—

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.”

He repeated them again and again, and they were still upon his tongue when the first faint gleam of daybreak crept across the land and he was led out into the cool fresh air. They bound him with his back to a tree. He glanced around for Sergeant Silk, and his heart sank when he did not see him. Was he to die alone, after all?

He saw Green Grass strolling towards him with his newly-polished rifle under his arm. Then came Louis Riel and Poundmaker with many chiefs and warriors, followed by a crowd of braves and half-breeds. Riel was smoking a cigarette, his step was jaunty.

“Where is the other?” he asked, looking at the figure bound against the tree.

“He has escaped, *m’sieu*,” some one answered him.

“Escaped?” he cried angrily. Then casting away his cigarette, he added: “Oh, well, after all he was not one of the hated English. A poor French trapper, one of ourselves. It is of no great consequence, since this one has not

escaped. Give him three minutes to prepare his soul." He took out his watch.

Green Grass strode to the line that had been marked for him and held his gun across his arm with a finger on the trigger. Roger Wingrove had said his prayer. He was ready for the end. He drew a long, deep breath as the scout raised his gun and waited for the word to fire.

Instead of the expected command there was a sharp crack of a rifle among the trees. Green Grass flung up his arms, staggered forward and fell with a bullet in his heart. At the same moment the shrill notes of a bugle pierced the air.

The Indians scattered in panic. A shell shrieked and burst over the village, volleys of rifle fire were heard. The battle that was to put an end to the rebellion and give peace to Canada had begun.

Roger Wingrove had fainted under the strain of the rope and the tension of waiting. When he returned to consciousness it was to feel the rope slackening.

"That's all right," a voice said beside him, as a supporting arm was flung round him to lower him gently to the grass.

"Silk!" he cried in amazement. "*You* here? How? Was it you who fired that shot?"

"Why, cert'nly," Silk answered. "Pierre told me you'd got prowling round here, looking for me. I guessed you were with him when I read your message, though I couldn't for the life of me make out how Louis Riel had got hold of it. I should never have escaped if it hadn't been for that scrap of paper and the idea that you and Pierre were waiting for me. Then, when I was sneaking back, I ran up against Pascal, the man you saved from the tree, you remember. He told me how you'd been condemned to be shot, passing yourself off for me, you rogue, and you may bet your socks I didn't waste any time in getting here. What?"

"That's about the tenth time you've saved my life, Sergeant," said Roger, fondling Silk's hand. "It was brave of you. You're always doing something brave."

"Brave? Don't speak of bravery, Roger. I have never done anything, shall never do anything, a hundredth part so brave as the thing that you've just done. It's the bravest, noblest,

most heroic act I've ever known. And now, let's quit. We're not out of danger yet. Let me carry you to our ponies. They're down there by the river, and the colonel's coming with the rest of the Red Patrol."

"That's what I've waited for and wanted," said Roger, rising to his feet ready to walk.

"What, the colonel and the boys?"

"No. For you to tell me off your own bat that I am brave."

In the evening of that day of battle, when General Middleton and his staff, with a few officers of the police, were at mess, Sergeant Silk got up and, putting his hand on Roger Wingrove's shoulder, told the story of Roger's act of bravery.

"It's no more than I should have expected of him, knowing his father," said one of the staff. It was Colonel Macpherson of the Canadian Militia.

Roger looked across at him, blushing as red as his tunic.

"My father?" he repeated in confusion.

"Yes," returned the colonel, "you don't seem to have heard. I've been making inquiries, urged by our friend Silk, and I've

discovered that that charge of cowardice was all a stupid mistake. Your father bore the disgrace and the punishment of another man and has since been restored to his command with a promotion."

"I've guessed that was the way of it, all along," said Sergeant Silk.

"Have you, Sergeant?" smiled the colonel.

"Why, cert'nly," returned Silk. "The father of a brave chap like Wingrove here could never have been a coward."

THE END

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